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**Inside Muslim Schools: A Comparative
Ethnography of Ethos in Independent
and Voluntary-Aided Contexts**

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Damian Breen,

December 2009.

Declaration

The work presented in this thesis was carried out at the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, University of Warwick, and is entirely my own except where other authors have been referred to and acknowledged in the text. It has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. Experiences during an MSc dissertation are briefly referred to in the thesis but are appropriately acknowledged and referenced. Sections of the PhD thesis have provided the basis for two publications which are listed below:

Breen, D. 2009b: 'A Qualitative Narrative of the Transition from Independent to Voluntary-Aided Status: A Problem for the Concept of the Muslim School', In: A. A. Veinguer, G. Dietz, D. Jozsa, and T. Knauth: *Islam in Education in European Countries - Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings*, Waxmann, pp. 95-112.

Breen, D. 2008: 'Reflections on the Positionality of the White, Male non-Muslim Researcher in Muslim Primary Schools: The Realities of Researching Muslim Women', *Working Papers of the Warwick SUMINER Group 4*, pp. 19-28.

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Abstract

The thesis offers a comprehensive comparative ethnographic case study of the influence of status as independent or voluntary-aided on the ethos of two Muslim primary schools. The analysis draws comparisons between the two schools in the case study, whilst also drawing on historical narratives of a further two Muslim primary schools which have made the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status. Research findings demonstrate that status as either independent or voluntary-aided had a significant influence on ethos, as the voluntary-aided school in the case study shared consistencies with the schools in the historical narratives following their own transition into the state sector. In the historical narratives the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status fundamentally changed infrastructure in both schools. Consistently with this the ethnographic case studies of the independent and voluntary-aided school show very different models of ethos. The model at the independent school demonstrated a distinctly Islamic ethos emphasising Islamicisation of the curriculum and promoting the concept of Islam as a way of life by an all-Muslim staff leading children by example. In contrast the model of ethos at the voluntary-aided school represented a duality of the Islamic and the educational, consistently with the schools in the historical narratives *after* acquiring voluntary-aided status. Against a theoretical backdrop of institutional isomorphism, the comparative case study demonstrates the ways independent or voluntary-aided status influenced ethos. Implications are that the voluntary-aided sector may only facilitate one particular approach to Islamic education which reinforces the concept of duality between Islamic objectives for the individual child, and the voluntary-aided requirements of the state.

Glossary of Islamic terms

Ablah: Perfectly formed

Adab: General appropriate behaviour

Abjad: Arabic alphabet

‘Adl: Justice

Alayhi salam: Upon him/her be peace, abbreviated to ‘a.s.’ after a prophet’s name

Al-hamdu lil-lah: Praise be to God

Allah: God

Allahu ‘Akbar: Allah is great

Al-Masjid al-Nabawi: The ‘Mosque of the Prophet’, located in Medina, Saudi Arabia

Aqidah: Belief

Assalamu alaikum: Greeting meaning ‘peace be upon you’

Assalam wa rahmatullah-i-wa barakatuhu: May God be with you, with his blessings and his kindness.

Ayat: Evidence or miracles, also verses of the Holy *Qur’an*

Bismillah: In or with the name of *Allah*

Din: The faith

Dua: Prayer of supplication

Eid: Festival. Usually refers to *Eid ul Fitr* which marks the end of Ramadan.

Also refers to *Eid al Adha*, the festival which marks Ibrahim’s (a.s.) willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God

Fitra: Innocence

Hadith: The traditions of the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.)

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca

Hijab: Headscarf worn by Muslim women to cover the head

Hikira/hiqmah: Wisdom

Insan kamil: The perfect human being

Insh 'Allah: God willing

Jazak 'Allah: Thank you

Madrassa: Supplementary Islamic school

Masha 'Allah: Used as 'well done' to acknowledge appropriate behaviour

Masjid: Mosque or prayer room

Nashid: Islamic song, often sung without musical accompaniment

Niqab: Veil worn by some Muslim women to cover the face

Qur'an: The Holy Book revealed to Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.) by *Allah*

Salah/salat: Prayer

Sallallahu alayhi wa salam: Abbreviated to 's.a.w.' following reference to Prophet Mohammed. Means 'may the peace and blessings of *Allah* be upon him'

Salam: Peace

Sirah: The biography/scholarship of the life of Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.)

Subhana Wa Tala: Glorious and exalted is He. Follows reference to *Allah*

Sunnah: Ways and laws of Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.)

Surah: Chapters of the Holy *Qur'an*

Tajwid: Appropriate intonation for recitation

Ustad: Master/teacher (masculine)

Ustada: Master/teacher (feminine)

Walaikum salam: And upon you be peace. Used in response to *assalamu
alaikum*

Wudu: Ablution made before *salah*/prayer in the manner as described in the
Hadith

Zakat: The obligation to contribute to charity, literally means ‘purification’

Notes on the use of Arabic

In the text Arabic terms are in italics. Islamic terms were often pluralised, both by interviewees and in the writing of the thesis. In these instances a non-italicised ‘s’ is added at the end of an Islamic word in the text e.g. *surahs*, *duas* etc.

Islamic Arabic definitions are taken from:

Qazi, M. A. 2000: *A Concise Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, New Delhi: Kitab
Bhavan.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is an empirical ethnographic study carried out in Muslim primary schools in England. The main body of the research takes the form of a comparative ethnographic case study of an independent Muslim primary school (referred to as Medina Primary) and a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school (referred to as Hiqmah School). In addition, interviews with key informant ‘Nasira’ offer historical narratives of two further Muslim schools (referred to as School A and School B) which, as head teacher, she oversaw through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status. The historical narratives of School A and School B provide a point of reference for findings in the comparative ethnography of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Institutional isomorphism, defined by Dacin as conformity to institutional norms resulting in structural similarities across organisations (Dacin 1997: 47), serves as the theoretical underpinning of the doctoral research. The thesis draws on theoretical arguments concerning institutional isomorphism, along with qualitative empirical data, to provide insights into the ways in which independent or voluntary-aided status plays a role in forming ethos in the Muslim schools studied.

Issues surrounding faith-schooling, or schools with a religious character in England and Wales (UK Parliament 1998a), have been topical in recent academic and public debate. Muslim schools have been of particular interest in academic, media and public debate following the events of September 11th 2001 in New York, and July 7th 2005 in London. In relation to faith-schooling generally very little is known about independent faith schools. Furthermore, the presence of

only 11 voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales means that little is also known about state funded Muslim schools. In short, published empirical research carried out in Islamic schools in England and Wales is scarce, and so it represents an under-researched phenomenon of central relevance for the faith schools debate.

Academics have highlighted the need for further research into Muslim schools (see Berglund 2009, Tinker 2009). Specifically there is a void in the highly qualitative ethnographic studies synonymous with traditions in educational research. There has been a recent trend in publications relevant for issues of Islamic education (see Dangor 2005), theoretical discussion of the position of Muslim schools (see Meer 2007), historical analyses of Islam in the West (see Weller 2006), and Muslim children in other/non-denominational schools (Ipgrave 1999). However, these contributions rarely draw on first-hand empirical data from *inside* Muslim schools. Therefore, although it may appear that Muslim schools are prominent in academic debates concerning faith schools, such debates are not informed by relevant qualitative research.

The state funding of schools with a religious character has recently been a topical issue within the context of a media climate where issues of teaching the theory of evolution have been fuelled by concern expressed by public figures such as Richard Dawkins. Although Muslim schools may find themselves at the centre of critics' concerns of state funding for faith schools in England and Wales, published empirical studies carried out within voluntary-aided Muslim schools are limited to one or two cases (see Walford 2003, Thorley 2008). As discussed

in Chapter 2, although offering important insights, these cases have varying limitations in relation to qualitative depth and/or academic rigour. In light of these limitations, along with the surrounding void in qualitative research, the focus and principal research question for this thesis is:

What is the role of status as either independent or voluntary-aided in the ethos of two Muslim primary schools?

Findings from a comparative ethnographic case study of an independent Muslim primary school and a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school address the focus of the thesis. Historical narratives of two Muslim schools which have completed the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status provide a point of reference when drawing comparisons between the schools in the case study.

Having established the focus of the thesis, Chapter 2 will offer a critical review of existing debates and topical issues surrounding faith schools. Initially, definitions will be discussed clarifying terms such as ‘voluntary-aided’ and ‘faith schools’ in the context of the education system in England and Wales. The chapter will then move on to outline ‘institutional isomorphism’ as the theoretical position underpinning the empirical study. Recurring themes in the faith schools debate will then be discussed, such as arguments concerning implications for social division. The second half of the chapter will focus on issues of Islamic education and the rationale behind Muslim schools in England and Wales before reviewing relevant existing qualitative studies of Muslim schools. The useful aspects of the faith schools debate identified in the first half

of the chapter, along with the rationale behind Muslim schools and existing relevant studies come together to inform the focus of the research.

Chapter 3 gives insights into the development of the research design and the theoretical considerations which preceded data collection. A definition of ethos as a complex concept provides the rationale for an ethnographic approach. Theoretical considerations which developed at the earliest stages of the research are then briefly discussed through considering issues of positionality between the researcher and participants. Anxieties developed concerning the position of the researcher in relation to religion and gender were dispelled by drawing on research experiences in practice. The chapter then moves on to describe the form which the data collection process took and the rationale behind approaches to interviews, observation and data analysis techniques employed.

Chapter 4 represents the first chapter to draw on research findings. Retrospective interviews with a key informant referred to as ‘Nasira’ throughout the thesis provide historical narratives of two Muslim primary schools she oversaw through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided as head teacher. These narratives are separate from the comparative case study, and offer a contextual point of reference in later chapters. Chapter 4 discusses the narrative of each of Nasira’s schools, referred to as School A and School B, in turn. The narratives give in-depth insights into the history and background of each school, the processes of applying for voluntary-aided status, the profile of staff over time, the changing profile of intake over time and necessary changes in infrastructure for acquiring voluntary-aided status in each case. The chapter then carefully

outlines how these changes in infrastructure represent processes of isomorphic change occurring at both School A and School B during their transition to voluntary-aided status. The examples in chapter 4 offer a contextual point of reference for discussing research findings (along with theoretical implications) in the comparative ethnographic case study reported in chapters 5, 6 and 7. For example, if x is the case at Medina Primary, y is the case at Hiqmah School, and x became y in the narratives of School A and School B during the process of isomorphic change, then such differences arguably can be more firmly attributed to each school's status as independent or voluntary-aided. Chapter 4 concludes arguing that, at both School A and School B, entering the state sector necessarily resulted in fundamental changes in infrastructure, and therefore institutional isomorphism. These processes of isomorphic change imply that status, as independent or voluntary-aided, had important implications for ethos throughout each school's historical narrative.

Chapter 5 introduces the schools in the comparative ethnographic case study. The first half of the chapter outlines the background and brief history of the independent Muslim primary school, referred to throughout the thesis as Medina Primary. In the second half of the chapter the voluntary-aided Muslim primary, referred to as Hiqmah School throughout the thesis, is introduced. As with Medina Primary, the background and brief history of Hiqmah School is outlined and distinctions between the two schools begin to emerge. Chapter 5 offers insights into the background of each school as a context for the in-depth analysis in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 reports the ethnographic case study of Medina Primary. Consistent with a grounded theory approach to analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967), the chapter comprises sections referring to four higher-level concepts, each containing several subsections. These subsections represent interrelated strands contributing to ethos at the school. Approaches to nurturing an Islamic environment are discussed first representing the foundation of the school's ethos. Following on from this, an entirely Islamicised curriculum along with an all-Muslim staff leading children by example illustrates that ethos at Medina Primary is consistent with the conviction that Islam is a lived way of life (Hussain 2004: 322). The overall conviction shared by the staff was that good Islamic provision will necessarily facilitate educational aims. As such the school is primarily an Islamic organisation which has educational obligations for its children as a school. The chapter argues in conclusion that ethos at Medina Primary represents an organic example of Islam as a way of life in practice.

Chapter 7 offers the in-depth ethnographic case study of Hiqmah School. Comparisons are consistently drawn throughout the chapter with the preceding case study of Medina Primary. As with approaches to analysis with Medina, four main higher-level concepts inform the analysis. Initially the process of becoming voluntary-aided is discussed before moving on to the ways in which the school provides an Islamic ethos. The importance of educational objectives is then discussed revealing that, in contrast to Medina Primary, a duality model of ethos centred around Islamic provision and requirements for voluntary-aided status is manifested at Hiqmah School.

Chapter 8 begins by developing a discussion concerning economic stakeholders and Muslim schools. This discussion unpacks the specific forms of institutional isomorphism which have been relevant for each of the schools in the study. The second half of the chapter revisits the rationale behind Muslim schools in England and Wales and existing studies on Muslim schools. Consistencies between theoretical discussions of Islamic education and research findings are identified along with consistencies with the existing studies concerning Muslim schools. The chapter identifies common *primary objectives* at Medina and Hiqmah, but also opposed *primary means* of achieving them. The narratives of School A and School B and the comparative ethnographic case study of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School are brought together to demonstrate how institutional isomorphism inherently has implications for ethos in Muslim schools which become voluntary-aided. The thesis concludes that status as independent or voluntary-aided had a fundamental influence on ethos in the Muslim schools studied, and that processes of institutional isomorphism are the explanation.

The thesis offers highly qualitative in-depth insights into four Muslim schools in England and the ways in which status as independent or voluntary-aided can have implications for ethos. Although the contribution of the thesis draws on insights gained through qualitative research, it is first important to establish the theoretical framework as a means of contextualising the focus of the research.

Chapter 2: A Critical Review of the Faith Schools Debate

Faith schools have always played a significant role in the education system in England. In recent years, and particularly following the events of September 11th 2001, faith-schooling has been in the spotlight of both the media and political and sociological debate. This chapter will clarify definitions of recurring themes in the faith schools debate before outlining the theoretical underpinning of the thesis through discussing institutional isomorphism (defined in Chapter 2) and its implications for Muslim schools. Within the section on isomorphism there will be a brief review of education policy developments concerning faith-schooling in England and Wales. This will highlight the government's sustained interest in faith-schooling, and applying theories of institutional isomorphism reveals the implications of this relationship for Muslim schools. A discussion of the 'faith schools debate' (in its current form) and its relevance for the focus of the thesis will follow, and a critical review of existing literature will lead to the conclusion that more empirical research is required if we are to inform the debate sufficiently. The above argument, along with theoretical considerations concerning Muslim schools in England and Wales, will come together to inform the focus of the thesis.

There is only a limited amount of sociological literature on faith schools in England and Wales which is based upon empirical research. Moreover, most existing research has focused on Roman Catholic, Church of England and Jewish schools. Publications discussing faith schools generally and Muslim schools specifically do exist. However, they rarely achieve the goals of drawing on first

hand empirical qualitative data and conducting methodologically sound academic research. Similarly, research into Muslim schools is ongoing; however, published research is limited and rarely subscribes to sociological, epistemological and methodological rigour. For example, both Geoff Walford (2003) and Sarah Thorley (2008) each offer a first hand account of having visited a voluntary-aided Muslim school. Although they inform their arguments with first hand observations, both openly name the schools they visited. This concern is amplified when considering that there were only five voluntary-aided Muslim schools at the time of Walford's publication, and nine at the time of Thorley's (Association of Muslim Schools, UK). Although increasingly topical, published qualitative studies on Muslim schools in England and Wales are particularly limited. Accordingly, although demonstrating ethical limitations, this is not a criticism of the quality of the research as Walford and Thorley's offer insights into Muslim schools which are limited in the published arena. As such their contributions will be discussed in the second half of the chapter. However, other more rigorous studies do exist. Claire Tinker's (2006a, 2006b, 2009) work on Muslim schools in the UK draws on first hand qualitative research carried out with various stakeholder groups. In addition, Jenny Berglund's (2009) published doctoral research offers in-depth insights into three Muslim schools in Sweden whilst maintaining anonymity for the schools. Similarly Dawud Bone's (2009) unpublished Ed.D thesis draws on qualitative research to offer insights into attitudes towards promoting cohesion in Muslim schools in England. These studies will also be discussed in detail in the second half of the chapter. The following critique of themes in existing literature will illustrate the need for

empirical qualitative research to inform the faith schools debate, particularly in relation to Muslim schools.

Recurring themes and definitions

Faith schools in the context of England and Wales

Schools in England and Wales take two forms: those that are independent, and those which receive some degree of state funding. The latter include voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools plus some Foundation schools and Academies. Independent schools, some of which embody a religious character, are entirely privately funded through charitable status and receive no financial support from local or central government. Under part 10 of the Education Act 2002, all independent schools in the English education system are required to register with the Department for Children Schools and Families (formerly the Department for Education and Skills) before the school begins to operate and admit pupils (DfES 2005: 1). In accordance, an independent school is defined as ‘any school which provides full-time education for five or more pupils of compulsory school age or one or more such pupils with a statement of special educational needs or who is in public care and is not a school maintained by a local authority or a non-maintained special school’ (DfES 2005: 4). In addition, from 2003 the Department for Education and Skills offered independent schools the opportunity to apply to be designated as a school with religious character under the Designation of Schools Having a Religious Character (Independent Schools) (England) Order 2003. It is important to note here that within the terms and regulations which bind independent faith schools the language of ‘culture’

rather than 'religion' is used. Specifically, regulation 2(e) of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003, encourages independent faith schools to 'assist pupils to acquire an appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (DfES 2003).

Within the state sector there are currently four categories of school falling into categories of Community (formerly County schools); Foundation; Voluntary-aided and Voluntary-controlled. The School Standards and Framework Act introduced the concept of a 'religious character' in 1998 thus modifying the range of types of school receiving state funding (UK Parliament 1998a). Whilst not permitted for community schools, foundation, voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools are permitted to have a religious character. Of these schools voluntary-aided (VA) schools are free to have denominational religious education (RE), whereas voluntary-controlled (VC) and foundation schools with a religious character are bound to the local agreed syllabus (UK Parliament 1998a). Prior to 1998, the 1993 Education Act provided an opportunity for independent religious schools to apply directly to the Department for Education for state funding through 'Grant-Maintained' status (UK Parliament 1993). Schools successful in the application process would be answerable to central government rather than the then 'Local Education Authorities', although strict financial and demand-led criteria imposed at the time made it difficult for evangelical Christian schools and Muslim schools to enter the state system (Walford, 2003: 165). Voluntary-aided schools with a religious character are funded up to 90% by local authorities, with outstanding costs being covered by a

relevant religious organisation (DfES 2002 [4]). There are currently around 7000 voluntary-aided faith schools in England, the vast majority being Church of England or Roman Catholic (Tinker 2009: 540). There are 52 voluntary-aided schools with a religious character other than Church of England or Roman Catholic. These 52 schools comprise 37 Jewish, 2 Sikh, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Seventh Day Adventist (Tinker 2009: 540) and 11 Muslim (Association of Muslim Schools 2009). For the purposes of the thesis the terms ‘faith-schools’ and ‘Muslim schools’ will refer to both independent schools which have a religious character, and also to schools which are voluntary-aided and are affiliated to a religious body (Jackson 2003: 90). In light of the above definitions the terms ‘voluntary-aided’ and ‘state funded’ will be used interchangeably to refer to VA schools with a denominational religious character which receive state funding.

Theoretical underpinning of the thesis: Institutional isomorphism

Background for institutional isomorphism

Schools, such as those types discussed above, can be defined as educational organisations (Dimaggio and Powell 1991: 67, Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343). Thus, the theoretical underpinning of the thesis has developed from considering themes concerning the nature of organisations in institutional theory. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that many of the positions, policies and procedures of modern organisations are enforced by public opinion, by knowledge legitimated through the education system, by social prestige, by laws and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by courts (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343). Such

elements of formal structure are manifestations of powerful institutional rules which function as highly rationalised myths that are binding on particular organisations (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343). These rules define new organising situations, redefine existing ones and often require participants to organise along prescribed lines. They are highly institutionalised beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organisation and must therefore 'be taken for granted as legitimate' (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 344). As institutionalised myths define new domains of rationalised activity, formal organisations emerge in these domains. As rationalising institutional myths arise in existing domains of activity existing organisations amend their formal structures so as to become *isomorphic* with these new myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 345).

It has been argued that religious organisations are of particular concern for agencies of the state. Beckford (2003) reviews arguments posed by the French academic Jacques Zylberberg concerning the relationship between religious organisations and the state. Drawing on comparisons between Germany, the UK, Canada and the USA, Zylberberg argues that each of these countries, in very different ways, provide a framework of public law and understandings that shore up religion in its relations with the state (Zylberberg 1995, cited in Beckford 2003: 94). Furthermore, he argues that religion remains, or has reverted to being, a legitimate force in public life (Zylberberg 1995, cited in Beckford 2003: 94). The recent work of Jürgen Habermas (2006) on the theoretical distinctions between and characteristics of the public and private spheres is of relevance here. Habermas' arguments concerning public and private spheres are useful when considering where religion and the state sit in relation to each other. Habermas

identifies two kinds of public spheres with distinct characteristics. He argues that the *formal* public/political sphere is an appropriate arena for formal institutions such as parliaments, courts and ministries (Habermas 2006: 9). The *informal* public/political sphere is held to be an appropriate setting for communication between religious and non-religious individuals (Habermas 2006: 10).

Habermas' distinction between the two spheres indicates that the state would be active within the *formal* public/political sphere, and that religious organisations would be active within the *informal* public/political sphere. As the *formal* public/political sphere is the realm of parliaments and courts, Habermas' argument implies that the state would be in a dominant position in its relationship with religious organisations within the *informal* public/political sphere. Building on this argument, Zylberberg goes as far to say that agencies of the state, as well as political parties, try to court religious organisations for tactical or strategic reasons (Zylberberg 1995, cited Beckford 2003: 94). Zylberberg's argument highlights the potential roles that religious organisations have for political mobilisation in the context of a framework of public law and administrative agreements (Beckford 2003: 94). This can be seen clearly with policies concerning faith-schooling which developed under 'New Labour' from 1997, which will be discussed later in this section. Firstly, a brief historical overview of the development of the education system in England and Wales will give insights into the relationship between the Church and the state over time.

Schools in England and Wales were established by both the Church of England and the Catholic Church with the aim of making formal education available for all children (Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving 2005: 35). Following the industrial revolution, an educated workforce was seen to be of increasing importance. Religious foundations had long been involved with educating the elite. However, it was not until the 19th century that education came to be offered by other than charity schools (Chadwick 1997: 5). Anglican schools, established by the Church of England and the Church in Wales, began to expand in the 19th century. The Forster Education Act (1870) established board schools in areas where elementary education was insufficient, and aimed to provide schooling for children aged 5-13 (Chadwick 1997: 10). The Cowper-Temple clause laid down that no particular denomination would be taught in schools funded by local rates, and religious instruction was limited to Bible studies in all state-funded schools (Chadwick 1997: 11). However, legislation enacted in 1902 and 1906 established the concept of a voluntary denominational school, maintained by government funding existing in a dual system alongside board schools (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 14). A range of categories for denominational schools was established in the 1944 Education Act, under the umbrella term 'voluntary schools'. The term 'voluntary school' referred to a school within the state maintained system owned or administered by an education trust, most of which are religious (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 14). Owing to the dire conditions of Church school buildings (85% of Church schools were Anglican at that time), voluntary schools were offered 50% of total costs to bring Church schools up to standard under the 1944 act (Chadwick 1997: 28), and that figure is currently at 90% (DfES 2002 [4]). The dual system continued

but was modified with the choice of ‘controlled’ or ‘aided’ status available to all voluntary schools (Chadwick 1997: 34). For voluntary-controlled schools, governors no longer provide any financial contribution for the maintenance of the school building and local authorities assume responsibility for the employment of staff and the school’s admissions policy (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 14). In addition, the teaching of RE is predominantly non-denominational and multi faith, but the school’s ethos and worship are denominational (Cush 2003: 12).

However, voluntary-aided schools provide for governors to continue to be responsible for the external maintenance of the school building and its improvements, with a government grant available towards costs (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 14). The local authority assumes responsibility for all other payments, and governors are the legal employers of staff and are responsible for admissions policies (Lankshear 1996: 33). Overall, the state funded faith schools today are predominantly categorised under the heading of voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled as established in the 1944 Education Act (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 15). The 1944 legislation finally approved a national framework of free primary, secondary and further education administered through the local authority and supported by rates and central government (Chadwick 1997: 33). Accordingly it is considered the cornerstone of a partnership between the Church and the state in England and Wales (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 15). Furthermore, the 1944 Act did not specify the religious affiliation that voluntary schools could have (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 15). Theoretically the door was opened for other faith groups to apply for state funding (Parker-Jenkins *et al*

2005: 15), although Tinker's discussion of the Islamia school's struggle to enter the state sector later in this chapter highlights how difficult the process has been for Muslim schools.

Despite initial anxiety leading up to the 1944 Education Act, the Catholic Church succeeded in obtaining substantial public funding without loss of autonomy (Grace 2001: 489). This signified a shift for the Catholic Church from the margins of educational endeavour towards a more pivotal role in an enhanced partnership with the state in a publicly funded education system (Grace 2001: 224). These developments, although impressive, were a struggle for the Catholic Church (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 23). The privileged role of the Church of England meant that it was the major provider of Church schooling and the major recipient of government funds (Grace 2001: 492). The strategy adopted by the Catholic Church was to emphasise the differential funding of Anglican schools compared with Catholic schools (Grace 2001: 492).

Under the Conservative government from 1979-1997, faith schools continued to be seen as part of a partnership with the state, fitting an increasingly market-based model of education (Chadwick 1997: 52). The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced Grant-Maintained status for schools, and the 1993 Education Act invited independent religious schools to apply for state funding through 'Grant-Maintained' status (UK Parliament 1993). The introduction of the national curriculum was met with concern by both the Church of England and the Catholic Church, as the government were seen to be exercising greater control over Church schools (Chadwick 1997: 51-52).

In contrast to the tensions between Church schools and the state under the Conservative government from 1979-1997, policy initiatives concerning faith schools under New Labour indicated a shift towards courting ‘religious organisations for tactical or strategic reasons’ as described by Zylberberg above (Zylberberg 1995, cited Beckford 2003: 94). The *Excellence in Schools* White Paper (1997) listed various ‘five year targets’ to be met by 2002. Among those listed there was an emphasis on developing areas of community relations, minority ethnic communities and promoting ‘racial harmony’ (DfEE 1997). The overtones of the above targets indicate the beginning of an emphasis on reaching out to minority ethnic/religious communities, and in particular Muslim communities. Subsequent New Labour policies highlighted a shift towards encouraging independent Muslim schools to apply for voluntary-aided status.

As discussed above, the School Standards and Framework Act introduced the concept of a ‘religious character’ in 1998, resulting in new and existing state funded faith schools taking the form of voluntary-aided schools with a ‘religious character’ (UK Parliament 1998a). Following from this, the 2001 Green Paper *Schools building on success* emphasised that faith schools appear to perform well when compared to non-denominational schools, and subsequently proposed expanding faith-schooling within the state sector (DfEE 2001).

In 2005, the White Paper *Higher standards, better schools for all* invited independent schools to enter the state sector, with a particular emphasis on encouraging Muslim schools to apply for voluntary-aided status (UK

Government 2005). Consistent with the government's continued interest in faith-schooling, there was recently a failed proposal for a compulsory 25% non/different-faith intake in voluntary-aided faith schools (Meinkle 2006). Furthermore, in September 2007 the government, along with representatives of major faith groups, released the document *Faith in the system*. The paper 'unveiled a joint declaration and shared vision of schools with a religious character in 21st century England', stating that the government recognises the aspirations of faith communities to secure more schools to offer education in accordance with the tenets of their faith (DCSF 2007b: 4). Furthermore, there was an emphasis on encouraging minority religious schools to apply for voluntary-aided status. With reference to the Muslim community, the paper states that nearly 15,000 Muslim children whose parents chose to send them to independent schools with a particular religious character, and therefore availability of places in the state sector could provide an important contribution to integration and empowerment of these communities (DCSF 2007b: 18). It is worth noting here that the Coalition government, which came to power in the time between conducting the doctoral research and producing the final thesis, has afforded greater freedom to faith communities to set up their own schools with state-support.

The above policy developments have direct implications for the procedures and protocols in place for independent Muslim schools that wish to make the transition to voluntary-aided status. If they are to be successful in their transition, they must fulfil certain ever-changing criteria to demonstrate that they can operate in a particular way, or be *isomorphic* with existing voluntary-aided

schools. Therefore the theoretical implications of institutional isomorphism are of central relevance considering that the focus of this thesis is on the role of independent and voluntary-aided status in ethos in Muslim schools. Having introduced the background of theories of isomorphism and its relevance for the thesis, it is important to explore a more detailed working definition for the purposes of theoretical analysis.

Institutional isomorphism: establishing a working definition

This section will establish how institutional isomorphism has been defined in theoretical discussions in institutional theory. As outlined in Chapter 1, Dacin (1997) argues that ‘conformity to institutional norms creates structural similarities, or isomorphism, across organisations’ (Dacin 1997: 47). Similarly, Orru, Biggart and Hamilton (1991) explain that organisations in a common institutional environment begin to resemble each other as they respond to similar regulatory and normative pressures, or as they copy structures adopted by successful organisations under conditions of uncertainty (Orru *et al* 1991: 362). Organisational forms are adopted because they have become generally accepted practice within a given sector (Orru *et al* 1991: 362). This explanation leads Orru *et al* to conclude that institutional environments shape organisations through social pressure and result in institutional isomorphism (Orru *et al* 1991: 362).

The theme of how institutionalised processes affect organisations is integral to theoretical discussions of isomorphism. According to Singh, Tucker and Meinhard (1991), institutional theory is mainly concerned with how the

institutional environment, comprised of socially created beliefs widely held in society and reinforced by social actors, affects organisations (Singh *et al* 1991: 390). As discussed above, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that societies contain institutionalised rules in the form of rationalised myths which shape organisational forms (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343-344). Singh *et al* draw on Meyer and Rowan to conclude that sociocultural pressures to conform to rationalised myths, rather than technical demands, affect organisations (Singh *et al* 1991: 390). This institutional isomorphism by which organisations assimilate institutional rules into their forms makes organisations in a given field more homogenous over time (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 153).

The discussions of definitions of institutional isomorphism above largely describe it as a *process*. It is this definition which will be referred to most frequently throughout the thesis, as the implications for Muslim schools entering the state sector are that processes of isomorphic change are required (see discussions of School A and School B in Chapter 4, pages 149-153). However, it is also important to establish that institutional isomorphism can also be defined as a *state*. For example, Deephouse (1996) considers isomorphism to be ‘the resemblance of a focal organisation to other organisations in its environment’ (Deephouse 1996: 1024). Thus, although outlining the same end result as those resulting from processes of isomorphic change, Deephouse identifies that organisations which are homogenous with others in a given field are in a state of isomorphic resemblance. This consideration is important because it identifies that isomorphism is not only relevant for those organisations which have undergone processes of change. For example, a voluntary-aided Muslim school

may have, in many and varied ways, been in state of isomorphic resemblance to other voluntary-aided schools for an extended period of time before making the transition into the state sector (see discussions of Hiqmah School in Chapter 7, pages 232-233).

It was at the data analysis stage that research findings revealed the extent to which theories of institutional isomorphism were relevant for Muslim schools. Theories of institutional isomorphism have important implications for considering how the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status may affect Muslim schools. The discussion above indicates that acquiring voluntary-aided status may inherently require processes of isomorphic change for Muslim schools. Therefore, by default, Muslim schools undergoing the transition will either: *a*) inherently come to resemble already existing voluntary-aided schools by undergoing isomorphic changes in infrastructure; or *b*) make a smoother transition into the state sector as a result of appearing to be in a state of isomorphic resemblance, in various elements of infrastructure, to pre-existing voluntary-aided schools. Both of the above propositions are examples of institutional isomorphism. Head teachers of Muslim schools opposed to state funding often highlight the increase in government control and loss of autonomy that can occur when an independent school enters that state sector (Tinker 2009: 541). This awareness of the implications of isomorphism for voluntary-aided schools, or a perception of what those implications might be, may explain why some Muslim schools have remained in the independent sector for extended periods of time (see the case study of Medina Primary in Chapter 6, pages 192-193).

A typology of institutional isomorphism

DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) offer a typology of institutional isomorphism comprising three mechanisms of isomorphic change: *coercive*, *mimetic* and *normative* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150). Coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by expectations in the society within which the organisations function (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150). With coercive isomorphism, pressures may be felt as force, as persuasion, or as invitations to join in collusion (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 67). Within this context, organisational change can be a direct response to government mandate (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 67). This is of direct relevance when considering the forms which Muslim schools in the state sector in England and Wales have taken over time. Since the School Standards and Framework Act (1998), Muslim schools in the state sector have taken the form of ‘voluntary-aided’ schools, answerable to local authorities (UK Parliament 1998a). However, between 1993 and 1998 independent Muslim schools pursuing state funding had to apply for grant-maintained status under the direction of central government (UK Parliament 1993). Both grant-maintained and voluntary-aided status represent forms of a mechanism for independent denominational religious schools to acquire state funding in England and Wales. However, the fact that this mechanism was the only option for state funding in each case, and that requirements and relevant authorities changed over time, perfectly demonstrates DiMaggio and Powell’s coercive isomorphism.

In addition to coercive pressures such as state regulations and requirements, DiMaggio and Powell argue that uncertainty can also be a powerful force which encourages imitation and thus isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). According to DiMaggio and Powell, mimetic isomorphism results from standard responses to uncertainty within and between organisations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). Uncertainty within an organisation leads to ‘modelling’ (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 69). As a result, organisations with an uncertain future model themselves on other organisations which appear to be successful. The organisations which represent models of best practice may be unaware of the process of modelling, or may have no desire to be copied. Nevertheless, the modelled organisation serves as a convenient source of practices which the borrowing organisation may use (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). Furthermore, models may be diffused unintentionally and indirectly through employee transfer or staff turnover (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). Modelling through the transfer of influential individuals has been of central relevance for all four of the Muslim schools in this study (School A, School B, Medina Primary and Hiqmah School). In particular, ‘Nasira’ (pseudonym), who was head teacher at School A and School B, has been of central influence in at least four of the 11 currently voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales. Her role has typically been transitory, with schools pursuing her expertise whilst making the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status (see Chapter 4 for a detailed account of Nasira’s roles at School A and School B).

Finally, DiMaggio and Powell identify normative isomorphism as inherently deriving from professionalisation. They argue that professionalisation is the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, establishing a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 70). An important aspect for encouraging normative isomorphism is the filtering of personnel in relation to skill level requirements for particular occupations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 71). Many career tracks are closely guarded, both at the entry level and throughout the career progression. As a result individuals who are consistently successful in their own career progression become virtually indistinguishable from each other (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151-152).

DiMaggio and Powell continue to argue that personnel flows within an organisational field are further encouraged by structural homogenisation through the existence of common career titles and career paths (such as lecturer, senior lecturer, reader and professor) with meanings that are commonly understood (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 73). Normative isomorphism is of particular relevance for Muslim schools entering the voluntary-aided sector because the process necessitates the filtering of teaching staff, with only formally qualified teachers retaining their jobs regardless of experience (see the narratives of School A and School B in Chapter 4, and the case study of Hiqmah School in Chapters 5 and 7). Therefore, within the voluntary-aided sector, the title 'teacher' means an individual with Qualified Teacher Status' (QTS) who has undergone a prescribed scheme of training regulated by the state. Although having the same occupation, an individual who has taught in independent

Muslim schools without QTS will not be employed as a teacher within the voluntary-aided sector should their school make the transition into the state. Furthermore, the argument underpinning DiMaggio and Powell's interpretation of institutional isomorphism is that isomorphic processes proceed in the absence of evidence that they increase internal organisational efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 153). As stated above, there may be a perception of what the implications of isomorphism might be among Muslim schools which remain in the independent sector for extended periods of time. It is also likely that, consistent with DiMaggio and Powell's critical stance on isomorphism, staff at these schools feel that processes implicit to acquiring voluntary-aided status would compromise their objectives. This position, along with related issues of moral obligation, is discussed in detail in the case study of Medina Primary in Chapters 5 and 6.

Having outlined the theoretical underpinning of the thesis, and also the ways in which theories of isomorphism are relevant for discussing the implications of independent or voluntary-aided status for Muslim schools, it is important to consider themes in the current faith schools debate more generally. The following subsections will discuss recurring themes in literature concerning faith-schooling to situate the focus of the thesis in the wider context of the current debate.

A central theme: Are single-faith schools socially divisive?

There are some useful contributions to literature concerning faith-schooling, particularly with regard to the issue as to whether faith schools are socially

divisive. Robert Jackson draws on this concern in reviewing arguments for and against state funding for faith based schools. He states that faith based education necessitates the separation of children by religion, which could also mean separation by ethnicity (Jackson 2003: 97). The implications of this are that single faith schools necessarily divide children on a religious basis, and therefore are seemingly inherently divisive. This view was held by representatives of secular/humanist organisations interviewed by Claire Tinker as part of her doctoral research (Tinker 2006a: 202, 2006b: 11-12) which will be discussed in more detail under the section *Existing research on Muslim schools*.

Implications of the above view are amplified when considering Troyna and Hatcher's (1992) 'contact hypothesis', defined as the conviction that inter-personal contact across ethnic lines, in and of itself, brings about better 'race'-relations by attenuating individual racial prejudice (Troyna and Hatcher 1992: 24). Jackson draws on the European convention on human rights as a means of explaining one argument in defence of single faith schools. He explains that incorporating this European convention into national law raises the issue of parental rights in arguments about faith based education:

...the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

(UK Parliament 1998b, schedule 1, part 11, article 2).

Jackson uses the above in a discussion of arguments concerning the justification of state-funding for faith schools, but it has implications for the faith schools debate generally. Jackson explains that one issue behind New Labour's initiative

to increase the number of state-funded faith schools was to avoid incidents of racial conflict, and to provide an environment conducive to learning for black and Asian children (Jackson 2003: 97). The issue of human rights is clear here, in that particular communities may wish to have separate schools based on their religious identity, with part of the motivation being related to a fear of racism as implied in the New Labour initiative outlined above.

When taking the above into consideration then it is easy to build a critical picture of faith schools, as the relationship between religion and ethnicity is such that faith based education may be to some extent obstructive to the ‘contact hypothesis’. This stance is illustrated by Rabbi Jonathan Romain’s comments following riots which occurred in Northern England subsequent to the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001. His conviction was that faith schools had an instrumental role in preventing pupils from different backgrounds mixing, and consequently children ‘may become suspicious, fearful and hostile’ (Romain 2001: 18). From this perspective, arguing for increasing the number of state-funded faith schools to provide for black and Asian children is to actually capitalise on, or at least accept, the notion that separation on religious grounds can mean separation on ethnic grounds (Jackson 2003: 94). Therefore part of the rationale behind New Labour initiatives to increase the number of voluntary-aided schools was actually *based* on an argument that faith schools are socially divisive.

Increasing the number of state-funded faith schools based on proportional representation is reductive, as the focus is on numbers of schools rather than the

quality of educational and religious provision. In referring to Muslim schools,

Professor Mark Halstead (2004) illustrates this concern perfectly:

Particularly in the west, Muslim schools have frequently been established in response to perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling and they have been happy to contribute to the preservation of Muslim identity and help children to take pride in their religion, without giving serious thought to the nature of the distinctive education they provide nor to the way they should deal with the philosophical and epistemological problems posed for Muslims by modern secular scientific knowledge.

Halstead (2004: 520)

These concerns are of central importance for positioning Muslim schools in the faith schools debate. However the limited number of published qualitative studies undertaken in Muslim schools in England and Wales make realistic inferences difficult to generate. Through a comparative study of three Muslim schools in Sweden, Berglund does offer insights into the ways in which Islamic education can vary from school to school. Her research will be discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter as a means of informing the focus of the research. The concern that Muslim schools might result in ethnic division may be amplified when considering that 69% of Muslims in the UK are South Asian descent (ONS 2001). However, critical arguments derived from this position are dependent on the assumption that the relationship between religion and ethnicity is deterministic. A fuller discussion of the complexities of the relationship between religion and ethnicity is present towards the end of the chapter under the subsection *Diversity within Islam*.

Faith schools, performance and parental choice

Having established that implications for social division are the central and most easily established criticism of faith schools, it is important to consider defensive arguments concerning schools with a religious character. School performance is one factor which is often used to defend faith schools. Since the 2001 Green Paper *Schools Building on Success*, there has been a heightened emphasis on expanding on faith-schooling within the state sector. The rationale behind this policy was tied to notions that faith schools generally have higher academic standards (Pring 2005). Richard Pring offers a critique of using performance as a reason to increase the number of state-maintained faith schools in New Labour policy. Following the propositions in the Green Paper *Schools Building on Success*, in 2002 the Schools Minister Stephen Timms is cited by Pring as stating that the intention to increase the number of faith schools was contentious, but they ‘did very good jobs in deprived areas’ (*Times Educational Supplement* 25th June 2002. Cited in Pring 2005: 52). This conviction is echoed in *Faith in the system* (2007), where the government claim commitment to the establishment of new faith schools for religious communities, and that greater diversity will help to raise standards (DCSF 2007b: 4). According to Pring, the next logical step from this perspective is to argue that in order to raise levels of performance it seems perfectly reasonable to increase the number of faith schools (Pring 2005: 52).

There are two factors which can be considered problematic for increasing the number of faith schools based on the above argument. The first can be illustrated when considering actual measurements of performance of faith and non-faith

schools in the UK. Jackson (2003) points out that the argument that faith schools give a high quality of education is a weak argument in itself. He refers to Marks (2001) to illustrate how Ofsted results are ambiguous, as there is great variation in attainment between faith schools, which suggests that high performance is not intrinsic to faith based education (Jackson 2003: 98). Pring (2005) also challenges the notion that faith schools achieve more highly than non-faith schools. He refers to the National Foundation for Educational Research study by Schagen and Schagen (2001), which shows that the performance differences between faith and non-faith schools is small, and may be a result of the hidden selection which takes place, rather than the 'ethos' of the faith school (Pring 2005: 52). Therefore the argument that faith schools can be justified based on their performance is contentious purely on the grounds that any distinction between achievement in faith and non-faith schools may be minimal.

Schagen and Schagen's argument that performance may indicate that a hidden selection takes place in faith schools has important implications here. The 'hidden selection' may refer to the influence of parental choice in school performance. By drawing loosely on the concept of cultural capital (see Bourdieu 1984), it could be argued that groups of parents who wish to be highly active in their children's education may be more inclined to exercise their right to parental choice. Therefore, if they have religious affiliations themselves, then they may be more active in ensuring their children attend a faith school which has an ethos in line with their own religious beliefs. Thus it may be that the most educationally active parents in religious communities pursue faith-schooling for their children, and that the emphasis placed on education in the family/student's

everyday environment may explain why faith schools appear to perform slightly better than non-faith schools. There is also an overriding implication of this within the context of Muslim schools in general. The majority of Muslim schools are in the independent sector as fee paying schools and as such may attract more active parents, whereas the lack of fees at voluntary-aided Muslim schools may attract less active parents (see Chapter 8 pages 265-266 for a discussion on parents as stakeholders).

In current published research the above remains a theoretical presumption as current data on faith-schooling is characterised almost entirely by data from Jewish schools and Church schools (Jackson 2003: 97). Subsequently debates about Muslim schools are not currently informed by empirical research (see Breen 2009b). As such New Labour initiatives to increase the number of Muslim schools appear to have been reactionary. The role of parents in relation to the research carried out at Muslim schools for this thesis will represent recurring themes in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

In addition to concepts of a ‘hidden selection’ process Jackson illustrates a more important point which demonstrates the second major problem with defending faith schools based on that notion that they offer a high level of education. He argues that *if* we are to accept that faith schools do offer education at a higher standard than non-faith schools, then it is important to consider the reasons why it is not the same in non-faith schools, which should allow the government to develop policies to help such schools to improve (Jackson 2003: 98). This consideration for the performance of schools in general raises the second major

flaw in defending faith schools based on performance. If we consider the argument that that faith schools divide children on religious lines, which can result in division across ethnicity, then to justify faith schools based on performance is to capitalise on the exclusivity of such schools. Single faith schools by definition are directed toward specific faith groups, and so higher performance, regardless of how marginal, will be of benefit only to an exclusive group. From this perspective then there is a *moral* problem in defending faith schools based solely on the idea of higher performance.

Indoctrination and autonomy

Pring discusses arguments critical of faith schools based on the notion that faith ethos may facilitate indoctrination and curb the development of autonomy in the pupil (Pring 2005). He explains:

It would be contrary to the aim of education to teach so as to close the mind, curb or atrophy the individual's growing autonomy, or to teach as certain something which is essentially controversial. And it is equally claimed that it would be wrong to promote a particular form of life as though, despite the plurality of views, one particular way of life was the correct one. That would be to indoctrinate – the very antithesis of education. Hence, the argument against faith schools. (Pring 2005: 58).

If we move away from arguments concerning the state funding of faith schools and instead consider faith-schooling more generally, the above illustrates an important concern shared by critics of faith education. It can be argued then that in terms of human rights, it should be established whether indoctrination is necessarily related to faith-schooling. Pring argues that indoctrination is associated with the *intention* of teaching so as to prevent at a later date critical reflection on the 'truth' of what is being taught, and so blocking out the

possibility of contemplating an alternative point of view (Pring 2005: 59). It is from this perspective that he argues that indoctrination, as defined above, arises as much from the secular assumptions of the media and the cold indifference to religion of the humanist (i.e. the sneering at alternatives, the constant portrayal without insight of what people within a particular tradition believe in) as it does from the closed institutions of religion (Pring 2005: 59).

Drawing on the above, it can be argued that there is no reason to assume that faith schools are any more likely to foster indoctrination than schools which do not have religious affiliations. This has implications for an argument in support of faith schools based on human rights, as a key criticism of faith schools can be seen to be applicable to social institutions in general. Pring concludes that the defenders of autonomy are both empowered and constrained by the philosophical traditions that they belong to, and so it could be argued that, in the pursuit of autonomy, the teacher, by not giving insight into distinctive faith traditions (not merely the superficial knowledge about customs and practices), is in fact diminishing the autonomy of the learners (Pring 2005: 59). Thus from this perspective, it would be possible to defend faith schools based on human rights as the argument that they curb the development of autonomy in children can be nullified at the theoretical level. However, with reference to Muslim schools, limitations remain with abstracted theoretical considerations which currently are not informed by qualitative research. Ethnographic insights into everyday life at Muslim schools would allow for more informed discussions concerning issues of indoctrination and autonomy. The theoretical considerations outlined by Pring above are revisited and informed with research findings in Chapter 8. Returning

to primarily theoretical considerations, it is important to look at the role of space and place in social segregation if we are to inform the extent to which faith schools have a capacity to be socially divisive.

Faith-schooling, communities and the significance of space and place

Barker and Anderson (2005) give an account of how ethnic and religious segregation of young people in Bradford was reflected in school intake in particular spatial areas. Local authority findings reported that some areas in Bradford were populated mainly by minority ethnic groups, and others had little, if any, minority ethnic populations. Barker and Anderson use this as evidence to suggest that many schools, rather than being multi-cultural, are becoming increasingly mono-cultural (Barker and Anderson 2005: 124). This can be explained to a large extent by factors related to space and place such as political issues within a given demographic. Jackson (2003) provides a similar account to Barker and Anderson. He states that unrest and conflict between youths of different ethnic backgrounds in Oldham, Bradford and Leeds in England during 2001 were stirred up by the opportunism of far right political groups (Jackson 2003: 94). Jackson goes on to state that in Britain there are *de facto* segregated schools (that is, schools which are characterised by a majority intake of one particular ethnic group. For example, an all Asian school with a majority of Muslim children would be a *de facto* Muslim school). He states that these are the product of economic conditions, patterns of residence and parental choice which result in virtually all-white or all-Muslim schools within parts of a single town or city (Jackson 2003: 95). As an educational reaction to the problem, programmes of cross cultural contact were specifically suggested under the programme of

Community Cohesion and the ‘Cantle reports’ of 2001 and 2004 (see Cantle 2001, 2004). Jackson concludes that: ‘the events of September the 11th 2001 and their consequences have raised religious tensions and reinforced doubts about the wisdom of separate religious schooling’ (Jackson 2003: 95).

It is important to consider here the position of faith-schooling in relation to the political issues concerning minority ethnic communities and space and place. A recurring theme throughout this review of the faith schools debate is that division along religious lines can mean division on ethnic lines (Jackson 2003). Therefore if we take into consideration the political problems of unrest and ethnic segregation present within a particular town, city etc, then it could be argued that faith schools may contribute to some extent to maintaining segregation which was already present. However, this is not as clear cut as it may initially seem, as it is important to consider which way around the relationship between religion and ethnicity lies within a given instance. Accounts of *de facto* segregation in Bradford, Oldham and Leeds have been used to illustrate arguments that are critical of faith-schooling by Barker and Anderson (2005) and Jackson (2003).

However, the schools which represented the *de facto* segregation in northern England were *not* faith-based schools. This is critically important for two reasons. Firstly, the schools were mono-cultural by all accounts, and were so based on the fact that schools came in two forms, either all Asian or all White. This is not the same as all Muslim and all Christian/Atheist. Secondly, when taking this into consideration, it can be argued that the segregation in Bradford, Oldham and Leeds which was reflected in *de facto* schools was ‘racial’.

Therefore religion was an incidental element in the segregation of *de facto* South Asian/Muslim schools. This can be illustrated when considering that since September 11th 2001, male Sikhs have suffered from Islamophobic racism from ignorant White assailants because they have beards and wear turbans (Goldstein & Lewin 2001). Although indicators of religious belief are significant, the above demonstrates how the concept of the 'Islamic other' has become heavily racialised as South Asian. When considering Troyna's contact hypothesis here, the very presence of segregation in the area implies that the White community may not know about differences between religions which are common in South Asian communities. Therefore the relationship between religion and ethnicity in the *de facto* segregation of schools in northern England is best seen as ethnicity being the first and major explanatory factor, and religion being a secondary incidental factor. This then is far from an example of faith-schooling in practice where religious division results in ethnic division. In fact the relationship is the opposite way around, and there are no faith schools involved. It is important then to consider the nature of segregation in terms of ethnicity and space in place as well as religion when considering accounts which may initially seem to imply a critical stance towards faith schools.

Useful aspects of the faith schools debate

Thus, the faith schools debate is not clear cut in terms of the evidence and prominent arguments that are of importance. However, there are some very useful arguments in defence of faith-schooling concerning the philosophical approaches that can be taken by such schools. For example, Pring argues that justifying faith schools based on parental rights, ethos or academic results

neglects the more important philosophical issues (Pring 2005: 60). For Pring, the objectives of faith-schooling should be, firstly, a deeper exploration of the meaning and the aims of education; secondly, should be characterised by an argument for the importance of certain traditions in our attempt to understand what it is to be human, and how to be so more fully, and thirdly, the promotion of articulating a defensible ideal of autonomy compatible with participation in those traditions (Pring 2005: 60). Pring goes on to argue that there have been attempts to reach into these deeper philosophical perspectives. However, such instances are rare and therefore faith schools are in danger (Pring 2005: 60). Thus Pring's suggestions for policy and practice, and structured argument in defence of faith-schooling, is dependant upon certain terms and conditions which would be arguably desirable in English schools in general.

Although this section has given a largely critical review of relevant themes in the faith schools discussion, that is not to say that the debate is without its merits. It has been absolutely essential in maintaining an academic focus on the important social phenomenon of faith-schooling in England and Wales. It is because of the debate that the English education system has continued to support, at least to some extent, faith schools as a legitimate necessity for certain communities. Given the historical nature of religion and education in England and the increasing ethnic diversity of its society, it is far more desirable that faith schools have been given the chance to continue to provide for communities, rather than simply being abolished over such an uninformed debate. The faith schools debate has served a purpose in stimulating sociological analysis and, therefore stimulating (albeit limited) empirical research, which informs the debate to some

degree. However it is important that we now move to a focus on empirical research as the central means of informing the debate so as to avoid rash policy decisions. At the moment, the impact of the few empirical studies that have been completed on the debate is limited. We need to build upon this limited existing empirical research so that we can make informed decisions about provision for religious communities. The faith schools debate has been essential over the last few decades in maintaining an academic focus on faith education, which in turn has facilitated research. Thus we have become increasingly more informed over time. However, the current climate concerning faith schools in England and Wales is such that we need to focus on empirical and sociologically sound research to inform the debate from here-on-in, before use can be made of traditional arguments concerning faith schools.

The rationale behind Islamic schools

This section will discuss the rationale behind Muslim schools in England and Wales. As established above, the lack of empirical social scientific research into faith-schooling has reduced some areas of the faith schools debate to an exchange of theoretical considerations. These considerations remain uninformed by empirical data at the qualitative level. It would be inappropriate then for this section to adopt any particular stance in terms of defending or criticising Muslim schools. However discussing the *rationale* behind Islamic schools will help to develop an understanding of why such schools have developed in Britain, which will be of key importance in informing, and thus developing, the empirical research for this thesis.

Defining 'Islamic education'

Initially it is important to discuss definitions of Islamic education. There are recurring themes in current sociologically relevant literature in terms of defining Islamic education. However, short definitions are not useful in themselves, as they are often too vague, and refer to qualities which would be expected in any form of education. Examples include the conviction that the fundamental aim of Islamic education is to help children become good adults (Halstead 2004: 523), or that in Islamic education the 'idea is to create an ethical, moral, spiritual being who is multi-dimensional and who has a direction that is positive and healthy' (Hanson 2001: 14). Thus defining Islamic education is more usefully done through looking at its aims and objectives within the context of a theological understanding of Islam.

Halstead (2004) does go on to give a detailed list of objectives that underlie Islamic education, and which are far more useful in explaining the rationale behind Muslim schools. He explains that for Islam the 'goodness' of humans lies in willingness to:

- a) Accept obligations of divine stewardship;
- b) Seek to take on divine attributes *hikira* (wisdom) and '*adl* (justice) which have been clarified through divine revelation;
- c) Strive for balanced growth of integrated personality, made up of Heart, spirit, intellect, feelings & the bodily senses;
- d) Develop their potential to become *insan kamil* (the perfect human being).

e) Allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship (Halstead 2004: 523).

Initially these aims and objectives give more insight into the rationale behind Islamic schooling. However outside of the context of a theological understanding of Islam it could seem that the above aims and objectives could be achieved through supplementary schooling, or even home schooling for British Muslim children. In short, the aims of Islamic education need to be considered within the context of an understanding of Islam at the theological level in order to give a full picture of the rationale behind Muslim schools in England.

A theological understanding of Islam

The fundamental point which gives focus to the rationale behind Muslim schools is the principle that there should be no separation of religious and secular spheres in Islamic theology (Hussain 2004: 322, Halstead 2004). Rather Islam is considered a 'way of life' (Hussain 2004: 322). From this theological perspective, Islam is not simply a 'religious sphere' which Muslims engage in as part of a wider context of social life. The concept of separating education from religion then is undesirable within the context of Islam. The aims and objectives of Islamic education cannot be fostered satisfactorily in an un-Islamic context such as a school which has no religious affiliation. This is a recurring theme in current literature concerning Islam (see Dangor 2005, Halstead 2004). In addition to his interpretation of the

aims and objectives of Islamic education, Halstead (2004) states that such goals will not be achieved automatically (Halstead 2004: 523).

Hussain (2004) builds on this by giving insight into the practicalities of the 'Islamic way of life'. According to Islam children are born in an innocent state, and can only become sinful when deviating from this path (Hussain 2004: 379). Therefore Islamic education is paramount for the Muslim youth owing to the belief that in order not to deviate from the true path, divine guidance is needed for all three aspects of a human's life: mind, body and soul (Hussain 2004: 319). In addition to the *fitra* (innocence) of the newborn child, at puberty the child has to take a covenant '*mithaq*' to recognise God as their absolute Lord (Hussain 2004), and so Islamic education is therefore imperative for the fulfilment of this trust (Hanson 2001: 26). Further insights into the rationale behind Muslim schools in England are revealed when considering concepts of knowledge from an Islamic perspective. Dangor argues that the highly regarded scholar of Islamic philosophy Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) classified two types of knowledge, firstly 'knowledge acquired through human reason', and secondly 'transmitted knowledge' (Dangor 2005: 520). The latter is obtained from divine revelation and is accepted by Muslim scholars as the primary source of knowledge in Islam (Dangor 2005: 520). Therefore within the context of Islam there are two types of knowledge and there should be no distinction between the sacred and the secular (Dangor 2005: 520). Also there may be influences on curricular activity within the English Muslim school, as a result of Islamic conceptions of the pursuit of knowledge.

The aims and objectives of Islamic education, along with Islamic concepts of knowledge, mean that the public/private debate is of particular relevance for Muslim schools. Habermas' distinction between the *formal* public/political sphere and the *informal* public/political sphere is of relevance here. Habermas maintains that, while political institutions should remain neutral with regard to religion, at the level of discourse between secular and religious citizens (and between citizens of different religious persuasions), the use of religious language and arguments should be encouraged (Habermas 2006: 11). Habermas is relevant for Muslim schools within the context of the faith schools debate as the informal public/political sphere can be seen to be consistent with, and an effective theoretical middle-ground for, the absence of a secular sphere within the Islamic perspective. Thus the rationale for Muslim schools is facilitated by Habermas' distinction between the informal and formal public/political spheres (see Chapter 8 pages 283-284 for a more detailed discussion of Jackson's application of Habermas to publicly funded faith schools).

Dangor (2005) has argued that there is a dichotomy between Western and Islamic epistemologies (Dangor 2005: 521) which has implications for the rationale behind Muslim schools. Dangor argues that education in Western countries is concerned with pupil-centred outcomes, not moral and spiritual development, whereas Islamic education is about being aware of God, not serving material needs (Dangor 2005: 522). There are problems with Dangor's argument, particularly his reference to 'Western' epistemologies. However, in terms of discussing a dichotomous argument his contribution further informs the rationale

behind Muslim schools in England. Whether or not the English education system represents a distinct ‘Western’ epistemology in reality becomes irrelevant if Muslim communities (and indeed scholars such as Dangor) believe that the Islamic way of life is distinct from that which is fostered in community schools. Thus, although it may not be useful in sociological terms to make claims about ‘the West’ in the way that Dangor has done, such dichotomous arguments are useful for informing the rationale behind Muslim schools.

Finally, social factors also constitute an explanatory factor in the rationale for Muslim schools. Facilities for prayers and ablutions, the integration of prayer times into the school timetable, the observance of religious festivals, the etiquettes of male-female interaction and acceptance of a code of modesty and Islamic dress, all constitute practical necessities for practising Muslims (see Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7). The arguments above thus illustrate why arguments based on moral obligation can be formed when considering particular characteristics of Islam which are central principles behind the ‘Islamic way of life’. Having considered issues concerning the definition of Islamic education and theological issues, it is now important to consider the rationale behind Muslim schools from a practical perspective within the context of the current faith schools debate.

Diversity within Islam

The beginning of this chapter reviewed arguments as to whether or not faith schools are socially divisive. The current debate can be reduced to two principal arguments: firstly that faith schools necessarily divide children along religious

lines which can result in division along ethnic lines (Pring 2005), and secondly the ‘contact hypothesis’: the argument that inter-personal contact across ethnic lines brings about better ‘race’-relations by attenuating individual racial prejudice (Troyna and Hatcher 1992: 24). These themes have shaped the faith schools debate and initially seem tricky to overcome. However the relationship between religion and ethnicity is not so simple as to be reducible to cause and effect (Pring 2005, Jackson 2003). For example, critics may argue that increasing the number of *Islamic* schools would isolate young *Asians* from the rest of British society, which would result in neither young Asians nor wider society learning from each other in ways which the contact hypothesis may suggest to be mutually beneficial. However, the fatal flaw in the above argument is that it assumes all Muslims to be ‘Asian’ in their ethnic identities. This is far from the case. Islam goes across many cultures and ethnicities (as well as denominational groupings), each with their own interpretations (Hafez 2003). Diversity in Islam is not only apparent in global terms, but is also evident in the Muslim population of Britain. Census data (Office for National Statistics 2001) indicates that Muslims in Britain are of African, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, British, Indian, Malaysian, Middle-Eastern, Pakistani and Philippine descent (Gilbert 2004: 259). It is evident that the Muslim population in Britain is by no means homogeneous, and thus the word ‘Muslim’ is not synonymous with the term ‘Asian’ (Gilbert 2004: 259).

Therefore, although faith schools are necessarily divisive across *religious* lines, this does not mean that they are necessarily divisive across ethnic lines. It is not argued that no relationship exists between religion and ethnicity, but rather that

the relationship is far more complex than the notion that one determines the other. Thus, increasing the number of Islamic schools could actually provide a broader arena for inter-cultural relations than possible in non-faith schools. It can be argued that in opposing this opportunity to exercise the contact hypothesis, critics of faith schools who claim that they are divisive (based on little empirical evidence) are not promoting inter-ethnic relations, as they would see it; rather they are promoting the assimilation of religious and ethnic minorities into British culture.

Profiling Muslim schools in England and Wales

Independent Muslim schools have been present in Britain since 1979 (Dooly 1991, cited in Tinker 2009: 540), and there are currently over 120 independent Muslim schools, and 11 voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales (Association of Muslim Schools, 2009). The Islamia primary school in Brent was the first independent Muslim school to enter the state sector through achieving grant-maintained status in January 1998 (Parker-Jenkins et al 2005: 44). The school initially showed interest in 1983, before formally applying in 1986 (Tinker 2009: 540). This application was considered and rejected in 1990. However, the Secretary of State was forced to reconsider his ruling following a judicial review of the case, but the application was rejected again in 1993 (Tinker 2009: 540). Islamia reapplied for state funding in 1995, which eventually resulted in their being awarded grant-maintained status three years later in 1998 (Tinker 2009: 540).

The campaign for state funding at Islamia spanned 15 years, and whilst this is particularly prolonged example, other Muslim schools have also had difficult and lengthy transitions into the state sector (Tinker 2009: 540). Al-Furqan primary school in Birmingham endured a four year struggle before they satisfied the criteria to receive state funding (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 44). The school was established by a group of parents who educated their children at home. Subsequently, redundant office buildings were found and the project benefited from the commitment of a group of Muslim women who wanted their children to be educated to a high standard in an Islamic environment (Parker-Jenkins *et al* 2005: 44). The school has since been seen to have flourished on ‘sound educational provision’, and pupils achieve well above average attainment levels at the end of primary education (Hewer 2001: 519). Similarly, Feversham College in Bradford first applied for state funding in 1994 but was not awarded voluntary-aided status until 2000 (Tinker 2009: 540).

Muslim schools in England and Wales can vary dramatically in size, teaching staff, accommodation and curriculum, with intakes ranging from five to over 1800 (Tinker 2009: 540). Some smaller independent Muslim schools operate in homes, offices or above Mosques (Tinker 2009: 540), many more function in old school buildings or other similar properties which have become available for use (Breen 2009b: 97), whilst larger schools are housed in purpose built accommodation (Tinker 2009: 540). For state funded Muslim schools, all teaching staff must be fully qualified, whereas independent Muslim schools may have to rely on lower paid unqualified teaching staff, owing to limited financial resources (Tinker 2009: 540). All state funded and most independent Muslim

schools follow the national curriculum, whilst a small number of independent schools teach an entirely Islamic curriculum (Tinker 2009: 540). These schools tend to be *dar ul uloom*, or Islamic seminaries, where pupils are trained to be Islamic scholars (Gilliat-Ray 2006: 56). It is important to note here that during their time in the independent sector, all of the schools researched for this thesis represented schools which aimed to fulfil national curriculum requirements, not those which would be considered to be *dar ul uloom*.

Existing research on Muslim schools

As noted throughout this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, there is very little published qualitative research into Muslim schools in England and Wales. Through her doctoral research, Claire Tinker (2006a, 2006b 2009) offers important insights into perceptions of Muslim schools among different stakeholder groups in the UK. Tinker interviewed representatives across four key stakeholder groups: politicians from leading political parties; representatives of Muslim, Christian and secular/humanist organisations; head teachers at Muslim and non-Muslim schools, both state funded and independent; and Muslim parents who send their children to the various schools identified in the penultimate group (Tinker 2006a: 76-77). She uses her research to counter arguments against state funding for Muslim schools, and in doing so addresses some of the issues discussed above.

For example, Tinker challenges the argument that religious segregation amounts to ethnic segregation, on the grounds that it lies on questionable presumptions (Tinker 2009: 545). Opponents of faith schools assume that such schools are

monocultural, and that non-denominational state schools are multicultural (Tinker 2006b: 15). Furthermore, their concern is more focused towards minority faith schools than Church schools (Tinker 2006b: 15). For example, a MORI poll conducted for the *Times Educational Supplement* (2001) reported that 27 per cent of respondents opposed the expansion of faith based schools, a number which increased to 43 per cent when asked the same question with reference to Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox schools (Parker Jenkins *et al* 2005: 4). Tinker argues that in some areas of Britain, particularly in northern towns and cities, there are Church of England and non-faith community schools that contain only Muslim pupils, and that this pupil population can be entirely from a particular settled migrant community (Tinker 2006b: 15). Conversely, some Muslim schools, particularly in London, have pupils of many different nationalities, languages, ethnicities and cultures, brought together only by their belief in Islam (Tinker 2006b: 15). Tinker gives an example, recalling that on visiting the London-based Islamia Primary School in 2003, it contained pupils of 23 different nationalities (Tinker 2006b: 15). She concludes arguing that the suggestion that faith schools fail to prepare their pupils for life in a multicultural society is based on inaccurate perceptions of both faith and mainstream state schools (Tinker 2006b: 15).

Another area addressed by Tinker is the question as to whether a child's autonomy to choose their own beliefs should be prioritised over a parent's right to educate their child as they see fit (Tinker 2009: 542). Critics often present the argument that faith schools allow parents and faith communities to inflict religious beliefs on their pupils, removing the child's freedom to choose their

own beliefs (Tinker 2006b: 12). Tinker outlines three problems with this argument. Firstly, whilst it is often presented as neutral, this view conflicts with the view of education held by some traditional religious communities, who perceive the role of education as the transfer of knowledge and inculcation of children into the faith (Halstead 1995, cited in Tinker 2006b: 16). Secondly, this argument assumes that faith schools indoctrinate their pupils and teach intolerance towards other beliefs. However, all schools, faith based or not, are bound to strict regulatory constraints such as the national curriculum and regular OFSTED inspections to ensure that they promote religious tolerance and knowledge about other religions (Tinker 2006b: 16). The third problem is that the argument that faith schools remove the child's right to choose their beliefs is often directed at minority faith schools as discussed above. Muslim schools in particular are assumed to take their religious aims more seriously and be more likely to indoctrinate their pupils than other faith schools (Tinker 2006b: 16). It is striking that these arguments are thought to have any foundation at all, particularly given the limited research which has been carried out in Muslim schools in England and Wales.

Tinker's work offers insights into how common critical arguments concerning faith schools relate to Muslim schools specifically. Although important, Tinker's work focuses on stakeholder groups and so only a small amount of her research was carried out in Muslim schools. With reference to the issues she discusses, Tinker argues that contrasting viewpoints about the consequences of Muslim schools are largely based on assumptions or anecdotal evidence (Tinker 2009: 550). She concludes that, accordingly, there is a clear need for further empirical

research to inform any future debate (Tinker 2009: 550). As stated at the start of the chapter, Walford and Thorley each offer insights into Muslim schools in England and Wales through drawing on first hand experiences. Walford visited Al-Furqan (note that Walford does not employ a pseudonym for the school) in 1999, soon after it had acquired grant-maintained status in 1998. The insights offered in his account are limited. However, they do give a brief picture of the school. The school's intake was less than 100 pupils in small classrooms, and teaching staff comprised Muslim and Christian teachers, of whom all females covered their heads (Walford 2003: 166). Walford's main insights concern the curriculum, which itself was derived from the national curriculum at the time, with the addition of *Qur'anic* Arabic language (Walford 2003: 166-167). The curriculum however was modified in different ways. For example, staff had deleted certain entries with marker pens, such as references to sex in a health document (Walford 2003: 167). Walford also highlights approaches to more practical lessons such as children being fully clothed for Physical Education (PE), the focus on patterns rather than living things in art classes, and the prohibition of stringed or wind instruments in music lessons (Walford 2003: 167). Walford concludes that, for the majority of the time, students 'were the same as other students in other schools' with the formality of the classroom, focus on necessary curricula such as arithmetic, chattering between children and being told off when misbehaving all being present as in many schools (Walford 2003:167).

Whilst Walford identifies some characteristics of the school which may indicate some level of Islamic provision, he fails to provide any detail in discussing the

ways in which the school might be distinctive in this regard. Walford himself concludes that very little is generally known about both independent and state funded Muslim schools, and this is clearly one of the areas where there is a clear need for further research (Walford 2003: 172). The research for this thesis, primarily a comparative ethnographic case study, will offer detailed in-depth insights into everyday life at an independent and a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school respectively as a means of addressing the gap (also identified by Walford) in published research.

Since Walford's publication in 2003, Thorley has offered more detailed qualitative firsthand accounts of Gatton school in Tooting, London (Thorley also avoids using a pseudonym for the name of the school) published in 2008. Thorley herself was a teacher at a voluntary-aided Christian school named Holy Trinity in Brixton, London, and played an instrumental role in establishing an exchange programme between the two schools. Holy Trinity's year 5 group took part in the exchange programme with year 5 at Gatton school once a term, so that the same children would meet up six times in a year (Thorley 2008: 11). This programme continued for three years, at which point Thorley arranged for a 'Learning about Islam Week' at Holy Trinity, during which staff and pupils from Gatton would contribute to assemblies, visit classrooms and assist children in completing an exhibition trail (Thorley 2008: 11). The trail included listening to a recording of the call to prayer, learning about *hajj* (pilgrimage), trying on clothes worn during *Eid* festivals, and Gatton girls demonstrating how to wear the *hijab* (headscarf) and talking about fasting and charity (Thorley 2008: 11).

Thorley also refers to specific incidents in detail over the course of the exchange with Gatton. Most striking is her account of a joint cathedral trip. On 7th July 2005 the two schools had agreed to meet at the cathedral; however the journey for children and staff from Gatton was obstructed due to the aftermath of the terrorist attacks which took place in London on that date (Thorley 2008: 13). Months later the schools did complete the planned cathedral field trip and later on also Holy Trinity visited Gatton's local mosque, and, in turn, Gatton visited Holy Trinity's church (Thorley 2008: 14-15). Thorley does offer useful and detailed insights into the exchange programme between the two schools. However, insights remain within this context, i.e. they were not borne of research *at* Gatton. Although there are some references to Holy Trinity having visited Gatton, all insights refer to the exchange programme. Therefore, whilst Thorley's publication is valuable, a void of published qualitative studies drawing on research conducted inside Muslim schools remains.

Bone does offer a qualitative study of a Muslim school in his (currently unpublished) Ed.D thesis: *The teaching of other faiths in a traditionally oriented British Muslim school* (Bone 2009). The school, referred to as 'Al Noor' (a pseudonym), was an independent Muslim secondary school. The focus of Bone's research was on approaches to teaching about other faiths at key stage 3. The rationale given for focusing on this cohort was that it would give an accurate representation of attitudes and approaches taken by the school and its staff prior to having to fulfil curriculum requirements associated with GCSE examinations (Bone 2009: 20). The research for Bone's Ed.D thesis primarily took the form of interviews with staff, particularly RE teachers, observation and documentary

analysis of teaching materials and ‘schemes of work’ (Bone 2009: 75) in order to provide an ethnographic account. The research revealed that RE was valued at Al Noor and taught at all age groups (Bone 2009: 140). However, the study also revealed that the school was not engaged in any significant teaching about other faiths at key stage 3 (Bone 2009: 140). Bone maintains that the founding ethos of the school was open to and supportive of the study of other faiths and cultures as a key exercise in the development of scholars who were to work in Britain’s pluralist society (Bone 2009: 141).

Substantive conclusions drawn by Bone from his research findings were that the underlying reason for the failure of Al Noor to teach about other faiths was the range of understandings of RE and the lack of an agreed pedagogic approach (Bone 2009: 143). At the time of the research, the school did not provide policy guidelines on what should be taught in RE classes or how it should be taught (Bone 2009: 143). Although interviewees held the conviction that they shared the school’s vision, interpretations of how this could be manifested in RE varied considerably (Bone 2009: 143). Subsequently Bone concludes that Islam was taught from two perspectives. In *dars-i-nizami* (syllabus now considered the standard syllabus for traditional scholars in the Indian Sub-Continent) classes, orthodox Islamic teachings were taught with a strong emphasis on memorisation and a minimum of critical thought (Bone 2009: 144). Conversely in RE classes Islam was taught with an experiential and critical approach where pupils could develop personal responses to ethical issues and acts of worship, adding to the ‘learning about’ Islam, and contributing significantly to ‘learning from’ Islam (Bone 2009: 144).

Although Bone's findings indicate that there was not any significant teaching of other faiths at key stage 3, he still offers insights, based on qualitative research, into staff perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching of other faiths. Furthermore, the concentration on one school along with interviews with a small number of key informants provides a narrative revealing several personal perspectives. This narrative allows for insights from *inside* the school, and subsequently highlights disagreements between staff in their perceptions of how to achieve a 'shared vision'. Therefore, as yet unpublished, Bone's thesis is an important contribution to qualitative studies of Muslim schools.

A recently published PhD thesis by Berglund (2009) entitled *Teaching Islam: Islamic Religious Education at three Muslim schools in Sweden* does offer a qualitative comparative case study across three Muslim schools. Berglund uses pseudonyms to refer to the three schools in the case study: Al-Baraka, Al-Furat and Al-Ghadeer, to preserve anonymity (Berglund 2009: 60). Although six other schools were also visited during the research, the thesis focuses on ethnographic accounts of approaches to Islamic Religious Education in the three schools named above. In some of the schools, Islamic provision represented a highly visible element expressed through decorations, regularly scheduled times for prayers, religiously oriented morning gatherings and the manner of greeting among members of the school community (Berglund 2009: 60). In others, aside from the Islamic Religious Education subjects, which had been specifically added, Islamic provision was 'hardly visible at all' (Berglund 2009: 60).

In the absence of published ethnographic studies of Muslim schools in England and Wales Berglund's thesis does offer an important point of reference, although it is important to clarify the position of Muslim schools in the Swedish education system. According to Berglund, at the time of the research, nine schools were classified as 'Islamic' by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Berglund 2009: 18). A further seven were classified as 'Swedish-Arabic', and as these schools offered lessons in the *Qur'an*, Berglund considers them also to be Muslim schools, bringing the number up to a total of 16 (Berglund 2009: 19). In 1992 the Education Act was amended making it easier to found independent schools in Sweden (Berglund 2009: 19). Contrary to the use of the term in the education system in England and Wales, 'independent school' in Sweden refers to both denominational and non-denominational schools which are funded by the state. Specifically, the term 'Muslim school' in the Swedish context designates a 'privately run' school which is nonetheless financed by the state and regulated by the National Agency for Education (Berglund 2009 20).

Berglund also offers a discussion of how and why she came to use the term 'Islamic Religious Education' (IRE) throughout the research. She argues that the term 'Islamic Education' has been invested with a variety of uses, and that subsequently the additional 'Religious' makes the term more precise connecting it with the subject of RE, signalling that IRE specifically concerns Islamic Education in schools (Berglund 2009: 26). Moreover, this term has been used in European countries other than Sweden to refer to Islamically focused RE in schools (Berglund 2009: 26). Having defined IRE, the study moves on to focus on the three aforementioned schools and the designated IRE teacher in each

school, giving three key informants for the ethnographic study (Berglund 2009: 61). The principal aim was to increase the understanding of IRE as a lived classroom experience by examining the formation of its content in relation to the various Islamic traditions; and how Islam is understood in a Swedish context (Berglund 2009: 198).

The principal aim is addressed through comparing IRE across several contexts. Through comparing the content of IRE at the three schools, Berglund found variations in approaches to teaching *Qur'anic* content. At Al-Bakara and Al-Ghadeer there was an emphasis on traditions and their forms such as recitation (Berglund 2009: 198). Although the IRE teacher at Al-Furat also held recitation in high regard, the focus placed more emphasis on the meaning behind *Qur'anic* content. For example, it took the IRE teacher several weeks to teach pupils the *Al-Fatiha* (the opening *surah*, or chapter, of the *Qur'an*) because time was taken to translate and explain each word to children (Berglund 2009: 198). Furthermore, at Al-Furat content from the *Qur'an*, was also used to support theories of modern science such as the 'big bang' (Berglund 2009: 199).

Berglund also found similarities between approaches to IRE at the three schools. IRE was viewed as a subject which guided pupils into Islam by showing them the best possible way that they can live their lives as Muslims (Berglund 2009: 200). Similarly, the meanings ascribed to IRE were consistent across the schools. Berglund argues that, although the schools recognised that the primary responsibility for teaching Islam lay with pupil's families, they were also aware that most parents lacked either comprehensive knowledge of the religion or the

time required to convey it to their children (Berglund 2009: 202). The idea of building 'connectedness' best characterised teachers' understanding of IRE, relative to their pupils. According to Berglund, this refers to connecting pupils to both the common Islamic tradition and the Swedish society in which their knowledge of Islam will be practised and applied (Berglund 2009: 202). This was demonstrated through IRE with recounted tales about the behaviour and attitudes of prophets and other important figures from Islamic history, thus presenting role models for Muslims (Berglund 2009: 203). Subsequently in all three schools certain decisions with regard to the content of IRE were made with the aim of counterbalancing a negative image of Islam perceived to exist in wider Swedish society (Berglund 2009: 204). Berglund gives the example of the inclusion of narratives depicting women who have had important roles in Islamic history as an attempt to redress the presumption that women hold a low position in Islam (Berglund 2009: 204).

Berglund concludes that ultimately factors which shaped IRE were the same as those which shaped other subjects such as time available, class size, age of pupils, classroom disorder and national curricula restricted, or even determined, what could be chosen as content by teachers (Berglund 2009: 205). Furthermore she argues that the personal perspective/epistemology and specific agenda influenced the way the curriculum was delivered (Berglund 2009: 205). For example, Al-Furat and Al-Ghadeer used the same local syllabus for IRE, yet the way in which *Qur'an* lessons were taught varied considerably between the two schools (Berglund 2009: 205). As such, Berglund's conclusion is as follows:

‘the primary finding of the study is that it is inaccurate to think about Muslim schools in homogenous terms’ (Berglund 2009: 205).

Berglund’s research offers important and detailed ethnographic insights into distinguishing characteristics of the schools she studied. Moreover, even though highly qualitative examples of approaches to IRE are given, within the context of limited existing research, Berglund’s conclusion reinforces the notion that very little is known about Muslim schools. The argument that it is ‘inaccurate to think about Muslim schools in homogenous terms’ provides a clear rationale for further research into Muslim schools. Drawing on Berglund, addressing this under-researched area will provide a means of further dispelling an implicit false reality of the homogeneous ‘Muslim school’ in the wider faith schools debate. The limited number of published qualitative studies conducted within Muslim schools in England and Wales further informs the rationale for the comparative ethnographic case study carried out as the original research for this thesis.

Conclusion: Developing the focus of the research

It has been argued above that there are some serious limitations of current literature concerning the faith schools debate. Having developed this critique of the faith schools debate, it would have been contradictory to propose an ethnographic piece of research with the intention of discussing models of best/worst practice of faith-schooling. Limited empirical evidence, particularly concerning Muslim schools in England and Wales, led the thesis away from the established ‘for’ and ‘against’ faith schools debate. The central theme of the

current debate is the notion that faith schools can appear to be socially divisive because division along religious lines implies division across ethnicity (Jackson 2003: 97). Critics also express concern over school performance being a key factor in parental interest in faith-schooling. The notion that faith schools perform better than non-denominational state schools, and that parental interest is inflamed as a result, raises questions concerning the exclusivity of access to such schools. In reality, evidence suggests that any difference in trends in performance between faith schools and non-denominational schools is minimal.

With regard to divisiveness, existing research which has been focused on Muslim schools indicates that it is held as a major concern among critics of faith-schooling (Tinker 2006a: 202). Furthermore, these concerns are disproportionately focused towards Muslim schools (Tinker 2006b: 15). However, the argument that faith schools have implications for division across ethnicity is based on the assumption that such schools are monocultural and that non-denominational state schools are multicultural (Tinker 2006b: 15). Existing research suggests that Muslim schools can have intakes characterised by ethnic diversity, as demonstrated in Tinker's account of the Islamia Primary School above (Tinker 2006b: 15). Conversely, it cannot be assumed that non-denominational state schools will necessarily have an ethnically diverse intake.

The faith schools debate has been important for raising issues, and for highlighting the concerns held by critics with specific regard to Muslim schools. Given the struggle which Muslim schools have faced in the pursuit of state funding, existing research suggests that further enquiry is required into Muslim

schools which make the transition into the state sector. Theories of institutional isomorphism indicate that the successful transition from independent to voluntary-aided status will necessarily require processes of isomorphic change for Muslim schools. Therefore Muslim schools which make the transition will either inherently come to resemble already existing voluntary-aided schools by undergoing isomorphic changes in infrastructure, or will make a smoother transition into the state sector as a result of being in a state of isomorphic resemblance to pre-existing voluntary-aided schools.

An important implication of institutional isomorphism for Muslim schools is that independent or voluntary-aided status may fundamentally affect ethos, and consequently approaches to Islamic provision. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on the influence of independent and voluntary-aided status on ethos in Muslim schools. The focus is addressed through a comparative ethnographic case study of an independent Muslim primary school and a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school. Key areas of relevance will include:

- The influence of independent/voluntary-aided status on ethos and how this may be manifested in ways specific to each school;
- The independent sector as a context for faith-schooling: focusing on parental perspectives on the necessity for economic investment in faith schooling for their children;
- The voluntary-aided sector as a context for faith schooling with a focus on the implications of state involvement for infrastructure within the school;

- Ethos outside the school walls: the relationship between the ethos in each school and perceptions of the values within Islamic communities local to each school;
- Admissions policies and processes of selection and enrolment;
- The role of Muslim and non-Muslim teaching staff in delivering ethos in each school;
- The nature of the relationship between status as either independent or voluntary-aided and the embodiment of Islamic and educational provision in each school.

The comparative ethnographic case study of Medina Primary, an independent Muslim primary school, and Hiqmah School, a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school, will explore the characteristics of ethos in each school. Definitions of ethos are discussed in the next chapter along with methodological considerations, the research methods used and the approach to data analysis employed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Developing the research design

The main original research for this thesis consisted of a comparative case study of an independent Muslim primary school (referred to as Medina Primary) and a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school (referred to as Hiqmah School). The comparative case study comprised several integrated ethnographic research methods. In addition, in-depth retrospective interviews were conducted with a head teacher (referred to as Nasira throughout the thesis) who had overseen two Muslim primary schools through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status. These historical narratives were not based on the life course of the head teacher, but rather focused on the history of two schools. Chapter 4 offers an in-depth analysis of findings from the interviews, and for the purpose of the thesis ‘School A’ and ‘School B’ are employed as pseudonyms throughout. This is to avoid confusion with the two schools in the ethnographic case study.

The methodological approach was informed by the focus outlined in Chapter 2, and so the primary objective of the research was to provide an ethnographic account of the influence of status as either independent or voluntary-aided on ‘ethos’ in each school. Ethos, a widely contested concept (Smith 2004: 58), will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Yin (2003) argues that case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a

contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin 2003: 1). My primary research question is:

What is the influence of independent or voluntary-aided status on ethos in:

- i. The independent Muslim primary school?
- ii. The voluntary-aided Muslim primary school?

The focus of my research is on the nature of each school's ethos, how ethos is promoted, and staff perceptions of the role of ethos in the everyday running of each school. The over-arching umbrella concern throughout the research was rooted in the relationship between the nature of ethos in each school and each school's status as either independent or voluntary-aided. Also, the issue of faith schools has received much media attention in the last decade. Numbers of Muslim schools in England are increasing, with small numbers each year entering the state system through voluntary-aided status. The concept of ethos in the case of voluntary-aided Muslim schooling is a new contemporary phenomenon, as state funded Muslim schools are themselves a relatively new development in England and Wales. Muslim schools that are granted voluntary-aided status have usually been in the independent sector for several years (see Walford 2003), and so the fact that Muslim schools are slowly moving into the state sector draws attention to the long-term plans of Muslim schools in the independent sector by default. Do they want to continue as independent schools or do they wish to enter the state system? What is the rationale behind either objective?

Muslim schooling in England more generally then is a developing contemporary phenomenon. Ethos in Muslim schools and the affect of voluntary-aided status is specifically a new contemporary phenomenon, as grant-maintained (and later voluntary-aided) Muslim schools simply did not exist prior to 1998 (Walford 2003: 164). The schools in which the research was conducted represent ‘real-life’ contexts within which children experience their education, and members of staff experience their occupational lives. With reference to Yin, considering the focus of my research, the general and specific issues, and the nature of the field, a case study approach was employed as the most effective research strategy for addressing the focus of the thesis.

Burgess identifies that the ‘case’ is open to definition in case study research (Burgess 2000: 45). As stated above, ethnographic methods provided in-depth accounts of two *cases* of Muslim schooling. The study centred on comparing:

1. The case of ethos in the independent Muslim primary school;
2. The case of ethos in the voluntary-aided Muslim primary school.

Defining the case in this way facilitates the comparative dimension to the research. It also clarifies the distinction between employing the case study approach as a *research strategy*, and drawing on ethnographic *research methods* to inform each case. Yin argues that case studies are often mistaken for ethnographies, or participant observation (Yin 2003: 12). However, the employment of ethnographic methods does not imply a case study, nor does the case study approach assume ethnography, or indeed any other data collection

method (Yin 2003: 12-13). Rather, the case study approach is best considered a research strategy, having grown from the aims and objectives of the research (Yin 2003: 12). Several integrated research methods were used to provide ethnographic accounts from an inside perspective of each school. Observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis were the primary data collection methods employed, and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. The next subsection will explore definitions of ethos in detail.

Defining ethos

In light of the focus outlined above, it is important to consider what is meant by 'ethos'. There are recurrent themes in the literature concerning the confusion that can arise when discussing ethos in terms of particular elements which may be inter-related. For example, McLaughlin (2005) offers insights into variations in what is referred to by the term 'ethos'. According to McLaughlin the concept of ethos is difficult to analyse because it is often akin to, and described in terms of, related notions such as 'ambience', 'atmosphere', 'climate', 'culture' and 'ethical environment' (McLaughlin 2005: 308-309). There have been attempts to develop indicators of ethos in the educational context, in the form of education initiatives in Scotland and Ireland. The Scottish initiative identifies twelve 'ethos indicators' including pupil morale, teacher morale, teachers' job satisfaction, the physical environment, the learning context, teacher-pupil relationships, equality and justice, extra-curricular activities, school leadership and discipline (Scottish Office Education Department and HM Inspectors of Schools 1992a, 1992b, appendix one). The Irish initiative specifies 21 aspects of school life which determines ethos, including symbols, icons and emblems; rituals and ceremonies;

communication systems; and relationships with parents (Canavan and Monahan, 2000 Information sheet 13, cf. sheets 9 and 10. See also Furlong and Monahan 2000, cited: McLaughlin 2005: 309).

Although such indicators may be useful in the wider policy context, for the purposes of the thesis: drawing on qualitative research to offer insights into ethos from *inside* two Muslim primary schools, it is more useful to consider theoretical discussions of ethos rather than descriptive indicators. In his unpublished PhD thesis, focusing on ethos in four secondary schools, Edwin Smith (2004) described ethos as ‘partly a creature of composition’ (Smith 2004: 67). In line with this view, though not exclusively referring to schools, Allder (1993) argues that ethos refers to human activities and behaviour, to the human environment within which these enterprises take place (particularly the social system of an organisation), to behaviour and activity which has already occurred, to a mood or moods which are pervasive within this environment, to social interactions and their consequences, to something which is experienced, to norms rather than to exceptions, and to something that is unique (Allder 1995: 63-69). In evaluating Allder, McLaughlin states that although some of the above invite critical probing, such as the claim that every ethos is unique, the definition covers a good deal of ground in a useful way (McLaughlin 2005: 310).

McLaughlin also refers to Solvason (2005) in considering theoretical interpretations of school ethos. According to Solvason, ethos is the product of the culture of the school, and culture is the preferred category of analysis because a ‘school culture is a tangible entity, whereas ethos is more nebulous, always

retaining a vagueness' (Solvason 2005: 87). McLaughlin concludes that, at the most general level, an ethos can be regarded as the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction (a human environment in the broadest sense) such as a nation, a community, an age, a literature, and institution, and event and so forth (McLaughlin 2005: 311). The influence of an ethos is seen in the shaping of human perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions in a distinctive way (McLaughlin 2005: 311).

The definitions/descriptions of ethos discussed by McLaughlin were developed to establish a working definition of ethos for the purposes of my research. As a result, throughout the thesis ethos refers to: a school environment within which collective human behaviour takes place, moods that characterise the environment (Allder 1995: 64); the product of a school culture (Solvason 2005: 87); a prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction (McLaughlin 2005: 311); a plurality of values which may characterise a given social setting, and to something that is definable by outcomes or intentions as distinct. For example, Smith argues that outside factors may affect teachers' quality of working life, their perceptions of their pupils and of themselves, and these in turn may affect their behaviours as teachers including their individual and collective contributions to school ethos (Smith 2004: 67). Drawing on his own research on ethos in four secondary schools, Smith concluded that factors outside the schools had a significant influence on ethos in each case (Smith 2004: 267). The above point is important when considering Donnelly's (2000) focus on the gap which may exist between

formal expressions of ethos (an ‘aspirational ethos’) and an ‘anti-positivist’ perspective which focuses on ethos in the lived reality of the classrooms and schools emerging *inter alia* in social interaction (Donnelly 2000: 135). By referring to ethos as something that is definable by outcomes or intentions as distinct, both the values promoted by teachers in interviews, and the behaviour of children observed in the classroom, can be regarded as contributing to the ethos of the school. Therefore the influence of an ethos will be seen to have shaped human perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions in a distinctive way (McLaughlin 2005: 311). Conversely, the outcome of the influence of ethos, in turn, represents the ethos of the school. According to this definition, it is helpful to think of ethos as organic and in constant flux, comprised of inter-related elements in continuous interaction.

The rationale for ethnography

It is the focus on the above interpretation of ethos which led to the decision to use ethnographic research methods. As argued earlier, the existing research on faith schools is characterised by outsider perspectives (in terms of the position of the researcher), such as quantitative accounts of school performance, rather than looking at insider perspectives (i.e. perspectives from inside the school) of ethos in schools. In practice, applying Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995) definition of ethnography allowed for insights into how ethos was manifested in everyday life from *inside* the schools. Their definition of ethnography states:

In its most characteristic form, it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions.

(1995: 1).

The need for an ethnographic approach emerged when comparing an interview conducted with the head-teacher of a voluntary-aided Muslim school (later referred to as School A throughout the thesis), and a meeting with the head of an independent Muslim school (later referred to as Medina Primary), during the early stages of the research. Both head teachers placed a great emphasis on the importance of a distinct Islamic ethos for pupils and parents. However, as the conversations developed, it became clear that the characteristics that comprised ethos in the voluntary-aided school were different from those to which the head of the independent school had referred (see Chapters 4 and 5 for a full discussion). Therefore, although both head teachers placed great emphasis on the importance of ethos, they were in fact promoting two differing approaches comprised of different values/practices/traditions. Employing an ethnographic approach consistent with Hammersley and Atkinson's definition above would give the in-depth, rich and detailed data required to understand ethos within specific Muslim primary schools. Thus, the complexities of defining ethos as a concept highlighted the necessity for an ethnographic approach with its capacity to offer a nuanced understanding in addressing the focus of the thesis.

The insider/outsider debate: preparation, ethics, practice

It is important to take into consideration issues of positionality when undertaking any research. Researchers, as humans, inevitably carry prior knowledge developed from personal life experiences which they bring to the research in many and varied ways. In carrying out fieldwork for this thesis, there was a constant point of reference at all stages of the research, namely my positionality

as a researcher in relation to ethnicity, religion and gender which required careful consideration both in developing a feasible research design, and during data collection. Dandelion (1996) provides a useful four sided typology of insider research, distinguishing between insider research as overt or covert, and between the researcher being an insider to the particular group or to its wider context (Dandelion 1996: 37-50). On the surface, as a White, male non-Muslim researcher who has experienced Catholic schooling, according to Dandelion's typology I would be positioned as an overt researcher who was an insider to the wider context of faith-schooling. However, preparation for data collection revealed that my positionality as an insider or outsider would be relative to the characteristics of the field and individual research participants at any one time. Preparing for the research thus required reviewing recurring themes in the 'insider/outsider' methodological debate with reference to ethnicity, gender and religion. The debate was of particular relevance at the research design stage where the design seemingly represented 'sensitive research'. As a result, in some instances, preconceptions were developed which were not realised in the field. Each of the following subsections then will discuss the 'insider/outsider' methodological debate, considering my position in relation to ethnicity, religion and gender in turn, before reflecting on the debate by drawing on fieldwork experiences.

The researcher in practice: considering ethnicity

As discussed above, the context of my field research indicates that issues of gender, ethnicity and religion will be intertwined, but it is important to consider each of these aspects of identity in turn. Although the relationship between

ethnicity and Islam is one characterised by ethnic diversity, the single largest group of Muslims in England and Wales (69 %) fall into the category of 'South Asian' (referring to those of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani descent) in the 2001 UK census (ONS 2001). As South Asians constitute the single largest group of Muslims in England and Wales, the ways in which my own ethnic identity as a White non-Muslim male could affect the research became a primary concern when preparing for fieldwork.

In practice, the problem of homogenising Muslims in relation to ethnicity was realised at the earliest stages of negotiating access. A meeting was arranged with the head at an independent Muslim primary school (Medina Primary) to discuss the possibility of researching the school. Through prior contact I was aware that the head-teacher of Medina Primary had reverted to Islam, and was of a White ethnic background. This initially seemed to be significant for considering the feasibility of the research in terms of insider/outsider debates. Although initially, at the categorical level, I am an outsider as a non-Muslim, in terms of my own identity as a White male, I shared his ethnicity. During the meeting, the head informed me that he had been a PhD student, and empathised with me, stating that PhD students 'need all the help they can get'. It was clear from the outset that I was an insider not only on account of our shared ethnicity, but also as a *researcher*, and it was this common ground that laid the basis of the conversation.

However, when discussing which data collection methods would be appropriate, the conversation gave insights into perceptions of ethnicity at Medina Primary,

and the ways in which gender might affect the research. I explained to the head that a breakdown of the school's intake by ethnicity would be important, and the head's response reflected fatigue with the question. He informed me that there were compulsory inspections which the school had to have, and that as part of a forthcoming one, he had been asked to compile a profile of the school's intake by ethnicity. I asked why this had not been done, and his response was that 'to ask a Muslim about their ethnic background is a bit of an insult, we're trying to move away from all that'. The perception of ethnicity at Medina Primary has had implications for my own methodological approach as a non-Muslim, and as a sociologist, because parts of the thesis (including this very section) inevitably discuss the relationship between religion and ethnicity. Even if the data collected showed the ethnic diversity of the school's staff and pupils, and thus challenged an assumption that such schools are ethnically homogeneous, I would be defending the school by focusing on a criterion which the head felt was irrelevant.

Considering ethnicity as a contextual point of reference in the early stages of the research raised a series of complex issues and anxieties. These anxieties were amplified when considering inter-relationships between ethnicity and gender. Kalwant Bhopal (2000) argues that her shared ethnicity and gender with participants was of great methodological importance for her own research on South-Asian women in east London communities. She claims that she negotiated access to situations which simply would not have been accessible to an outsider. Bhopal elaborates, arguing that common 'race' assists the researcher and the researched in placing each other within the social structure, and so this can have

a positive bearing on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Bhopal 2000: 73). According to Bhopal, commonality between the researcher and the researched makes it easier for each party to identify with each other, thus assisting the establishment of a rapport (Bhopal 2000: 73). Bhopal's argument indicates implications for my data collection when studying South Asian Muslims.

Bhopal uses her research experience to argue that shared ethnicity between the researcher and the researched is beneficial. However, examples of research conducted by White male researchers who do not share ethnicity or gender with participants *do* exist and offer insights into the lives of the researched. A good example is Mairtin Mac an Ghaill's *Young Gifted and Black* (1988) which focused on South Asian and Black female sixth-formers experiences of school life through retrospective interviews (Mac an Ghaill 1988: 15). His work provided accounts of institutionalised racism within the school, racist teachers, bullying and the social grouping of students in relation to their ethnicity and retrospective accounts of the allocation of bright Black males to low streams (Mac an Ghaill 1988). Through these insights, Mac an Ghaill's work has contributed to a sociological understanding of the position of minority ethnic female students in education. Thus, although there is logic to Bhopal's argument that her ethnic and gender identity assisted her negotiation of access to South Asian women, this is not to say that, for example, White male researchers cannot research minority communities. The wider academic argument is simply that researchers who do not share their gender and ethnic identity with their respondents will produce different kinds of research to those who do. Issues

related to gender will be discussed later in this chapter. However, it is first important to discuss the methodological implications of insider/outsider issues in relation to religion.

The problem of reductionism for the study of religion

Although it is possible to argue that insiders and outsiders will simply produce different kinds of research, it is still important to establish how outsiders should approach their research. Donald Wiebe (1999) outlines an important problem for the study of religion: that polarised arguments over insider/outsider issues in religion deal in absolutes. The debate can go back and forth infinitely unless we accept that both standpoints of insider and outsider in the study of religion have important epistemological implications (Wiebe 1999: 268). Raymond Firth offers a stark insight into his own personal position as a means of arguing strongly in favour of the outsider in the study of religion. He argues that as an anthropologist, his enquiries have been led by two themes: empiricism and humanism (Firth 1999: 120). With regard to empiricism, Firth accepts the 'validity of sensory experience' as a guide to knowledge over revelation, but also accepts that sensory experiences may be illusory (Firth 1999: 120). Firth moves toward reductionism when discussing the methodological implications of his convictions as a humanist. He claims that a humanist approach to religion, within an anthropological framework, means that rational study can go much further than religious people are often prepared to allow (Firth 1999: 121-122), indicating support for the outsider in the study of religion. Firth concludes 'to an anthropologist such as myself, religion, including ideas of God, is clearly a human construct' (Firth 1999: 122).

It is this claim which opens up the issue of reductionism in the dichotomy between insiders and outsiders in the study of religion. From a sociological perspective, Firth's claims are based upon the underlying assumption that there is a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders in social research. Initially this may seem to ease concerns about being an outsider, as I am polarised from insiders, and thus destined to produce different kinds of research to them. However, as a sociologist, the epistemological implications of a dichotomous approach to the insider/outsider debate are worrying because, as a researcher, I am utterly dependent on insiders (Muslims) at every stage of the research. Establishing that insiders and outsiders will produce different kinds of research is an argument with a view to developing a sound methodological approach. However, subscribing to the claim that there is a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders implies that researchers in the study of religion either need to be atheistic-humanists or religious fundamentalists.

Bilal Sambur's (2002) essay 'From the dichotomy of spiritualism/ritualism to the dichotomy of insider/outsider' illustrates the importance of the relationship between insiders and outsiders in researching religion. Sambur raises the question: 'should religion be looked upon as merely another human construction like the economy, society or the state, or is it something more?' (Sambur 2002: 28). Firth has asserted above that his own empiricist/humanist position is that religion is a social construct. However, Sambur challenges the usefulness of this concrete stance, by taking into consideration the implications of the above question for both the insider and outsider. He asks 'is it the proper attitude on

the part of the outsider to start his/her research under the pre-formed assumption that all things coming from organised religion should be simply assigned to the category of human construction?’ And alternatively: ‘is it proper for an insider to presume that everything they experience in their daily life emanates from a divine source?’ (Sambur 2002: 28).

Sambur argues that although the outsider should value the insider’s view, s/he should not be dependent on the affirmation of the insider in order to validate his/her own views. If the outsider seeks affirmation from the insider, then he/she accepts that religion is the sole property of the insider, or a particular sub-set of insiders, and that no-one has access to this property without their permission (Sambur 2002: 28). Sambur develops this argument, stating that religion cannot make claims of universality, or be meaningful and relevant for the lives of others if it is considered the sole property of a limited number of people (Sambur 2002: 28). He states that Islam presents itself as a religion not just for Muslims, but for the rest of humanity. Therefore whether one is a Muslim/non-Muslim, insider/outsider, everyone should be able to study and interpret the teachings of Islam, and thus has the right to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to Islam, and that all of humanity should have equal access to the knowledge that religious traditions possess (Sambur 2002: 28).

Sambur concludes by arguing that it is how valuable the outsider considers the contribution of the insider’s religious life to be for the wider community which is important (Sambur 2002: 30). Through stressing the importance of a relationship based on value between the insider and the outsider, he maintains that the

outsider's point of view should not, and cannot be formed independently of the insider's perspective (Sambur 2002: 28). It is Sambur's perspective which offers a refreshing solution to both the insider/outsider debate in terms of overcoming the 'for and against' format evident in the traditional literature on religious studies. Also a dichotomous approach is transcended by stressing the need for a relationship between the two camps in research. This also offers a methodologically sound solution to being an outsider from a sociological (and academic) perspective. As a sociologist I have drawn on the work of Muslim social scientists, Islamic scholars, and Islamic texts more generally in my background research. However, and more importantly, as all of the fieldwork took place in Muslim schools, all primary data was drawn either from Muslims, or from research in an Islamic environment. Thus, the context of sociology as a discipline meant that in practice my own outsider perspective was entirely dependent on valuing the perspective of the insider. It is worth noting here that, although not a Muslim researcher, s.a.w. is used after references to the Prophet Mohammed throughout this thesis as a gesture towards transcending the dichotomy of insiders and outsiders.

Gender in the context of research in Muslim schools

In addition to my positionality in relation to ethnicity and religion, it is also important to take into consideration gender. Primary schools typically have a higher percentage of female staff than male staff and all the schools in the study reflected this. My research revealed that gender represented a more relevant point of reference than ethnicity for my positionality as a researcher. Considering gender specifically in relation to the context of Islam provided a

mechanism for overcoming preconceptions concerning ethnicity and religion which arose in preparation for the research. The form that this process took is fully explained in the subsection: *Conducting research among Muslim women: reality in the field.*

During the earliest stages of the research an issue arose in relation to gender which raised concerns about my ability to develop rapport. Both the head-teachers of School A and Medina Primary indicated that there was a specific trend for a high turnover of female staff in Muslim schools. The head of Medina Primary explained:

I think this is part of the thing with the community; we do tend to get a high turnover because younger women particularly join us as single women and within a year, eighteen months of them graduating, they're married and we tend to then lose them. Once they get beyond twenty-five, and they're still unmarried, their families put huge pressure on them.

Owing to the high turnover of female staff there were likely to be considerable numbers of new female teaching staff in the school at any one time. Issues raised when preparing for the research were amplified as I realised that new teaching staff might not be as confident, and might therefore be uncomfortable with my presence in the classroom, or be reluctant to volunteer for interviews. During the data collection this particular concern proved to be well founded and it will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

During early stages of data collection being a potential outsider in terms of ethnicity, gender and religion raised concerns about the feasibility of conducting sound research. In both schools, over a period of six months, through interviews and sessions of classroom observation, the research process brought me into

contact with Muslim women of African, Middle-Eastern, South-Asian, and White descent. As the staff at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School were more ethnically diverse than the national census data led me to expect, I decided to pay more attention to the impact of my gender than my ethnicity as a reflexive researcher.

Preparing to interview and observe Muslim women

Whilst conducting fieldwork for my thesis, it was clear that the ethnic diversity at Medina Primary was such that it was difficult to establish if there was a majority of children, or staff, from any one ethnic identity. It is for this reason that the main point of reflection as a male non-Muslim researcher became gender relations rather than ethnicity, as gender represented a more consistent point of reference than ethnicity during data collection. This is due to the trend of much larger numbers of female teachers in primary education in general, as well as in Muslim primary schools specifically.

Gender was therefore prioritised as the key ethical concern in relation to my own positionality as a researcher. High profile and widespread debate in the first decade of the twenty-first century, particularly concerning the wearing of the *hijab* (headscarf) and *niqab* (veil covering the face) by Muslim women (see Ali 2005, Bigger 2006, Freedman 2004, Hirschmann 1998, Laborde 2005), increased my self-consciousness as a non-Muslim male researcher. Some of my initial concerns were quickly realised. In the first interview with the head of Medina Primary it became apparent that there were two possible restrictions in terms of gender and the research process. Firstly, as illustrated in the interview excerpt

above, the high turnover of female staff in the school had resulted in several teachers having only joined the school a month before the research began. As a result, the head was concerned that they would be uncomfortable with my presence in the class, although three new teachers did volunteer to be interviewed. The main implication was that I might have only limited access to conduct observation.

The second main concern was that some female staff members would not be comfortable either with being interviewed by me or (solely because they wore the *niqab*) with my presence in their classrooms during observation. The head explained that there were two female class teachers who wore the *niqab*, but that the women only covered their faces when in the presence of men, and not when teaching children. My presence as a male in the classroom then would alter the environment as the teacher would have to cover her face. As the only two men in the school were the head and a supplementary specialist in *Qur'an* and Arabic, my concerns were that it would be unusual for the teachers to be teaching for any length of time whilst wearing the *niqab*. The two potential implications of this were that my presence in the classroom during observation would result in children being taught in a way that they are not familiar with for long periods of time (i.e. not being able to see their teacher's face), and consequently observation notes would not represent typical classroom interaction.

Conducting research among Muslim women: reality in the field

Despite early concerns about how issues related to gender might restrict data collection, in practice the research benefited in two ways in relation to the

perceived sensitivity of having a non-Muslim man as a researcher among Muslim women. The more immediate realisation that followed early meetings with the head at Medina Primary was that my position as an ‘outsider’ was reduced by one dimension when considering that the majority of the research experience would bring me into contact with Muslim women. As established earlier, at the start of this discussion I was a White, male non-Muslim researcher. Having taken into consideration early research experiences which revealed I would be surrounded by ethnic diversity during the research, my position as a potential ‘outsider’ was reduced by one dimension: ethnicity. My position as a potential outsider is reduced further when considering that a male Muslim researcher would face the same restrictions when carrying out research that involved Muslim women. For example, during observation a Muslim woman who wore the *niqab* would still cover her face in the presence of a male Muslim researcher. Similarly, the format of the interview could have remained unchanged regardless of whether or not the interviewer was Muslim. The content of conversation may be more informed compared to interviews conducted by non-Muslim men, and certain etiquettes may be followed based on the male Muslim researcher’s prior knowledge about Muslim women, but the process of the interview remains unchanged. It is for the reasons discussed above that gender took priority over issues of ethnicity and religion in the field.

The second main positive outcome for the research in relation to concerns about the *niqab* was that in reality it did not necessarily represent a restriction for me as a male researcher. When carrying out research at Medina Primary, one of the most forthcoming female participants, the year 2 teacher, wore the *niqab*. It was

made clear early on that observation could be conducted in her class whenever other teachers were not available for interviews or observation. In contrast to the concerns developed whilst preparing for the research and in negotiating access, it was not the case that my presence as a male would change the teaching environment. For example, the male specialist teacher in *Qur'an* and Arabic taught supplementary lessons in all of the classes in the school which implies that pupils are familiar with some female teachers wearing the *niqab* during Arabic lessons. On several occasions our schedules were synchronised so that observation was conducted in the year 2 class whilst the *Qur'an* teacher was present. This effectively reduced the extent to which my gender was affecting the teaching environment. Observation was also conducted in the year 2 class on several occasions without the *Qur'an* teacher being present. Also, the classroom itself was located near the school entrance where male parents would periodically enter the school. The year 2 teacher's consequent awareness of the ongoing possibility of men being near her classroom arguably reduced the impact of my own presence.

The above discussion illustrates how preconceptions can develop when preparing for research in apparently 'sensitive' situations. The reality of the research experience highlights the extent to which the pursuit of ethical practice resulted in developing negative preconceptions which turned out to be partially unfounded. Although the emphasis above is on the experiences of conducting observation with only one teacher who wore the *niqab*, in total I interviewed four women (three teachers and one teaching assistant) who wore the *niqab* in the independent school. Two of those teachers were new to the school and

consequently were not comfortable with my conducting observation. However, they were forthcoming in participating in interviews. Probably those who were uncomfortable with being observed were so because of their short time teaching at the school, rather than only because of my gender. It is worth noting that although the above discussion focuses on the specific example of veiled women at Medina Primary, in total 25 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted throughout the duration of the research, only five of which were conducted with men. The male to female ratio of participants demonstrates that gender was less of an issue than I had anticipated when preparing for the research.

Summarising the insider/outsider debate

In terms of ethnicity, gender and religion insiders will produce different kinds of research from outsiders. However, this point should not be used to argue that insider/outsider issues are not important. Furthermore, we should transcend dichotomous approaches by placing an emphasis on the inter-relationship between insiders and outsiders in research more generally; an outsider is only an outsider relative to studying the insider, and thus a relationship based on value is necessary (Sambur 2002: 28). This has been particularly demonstrated in considerations surrounding gender in the research process. Employing professional researcher-participant etiquette resulted in a research experience where I was made to feel comfortable as a non-Muslim male. However, there were periods of time early in my research when my presence as a non-Muslim male, along with preconceptions developed during preparation, induced what I have referred to elsewhere as 'researcher paranoia' (Breen 2008: 25) when in research settings with Muslim women. When conducting an interview with the

female head-teacher of Hiqmah School I openly asked if there were any issues that I should be aware of as a non-Muslim man researching among Muslim women. She explained:

It depends upon individuals and how they have understood Islam, and for Muslim members of staff, how they have chosen to practice it. I would normally say not to shake hands for example. Though there are some Muslim women who don't have any problems with that, and distance, in terms of not sitting too close. But other than those two, the rest I think is very much of a personal thing... Some ladies would like to be able to cover their faces whilst they're having a conversation. Some don't like to be interviewed, or have conversations with a male on their own... I know that there are some females who don't like to have eye to eye contact and so those are very much personal choices.

The above illustrates just how individualised the appropriate etiquette can be. The specific advice to avoid close proximity can be taken as a universal given when interviewing women as a male researcher. In this head teacher's view, avoiding initiating a handshake was the only rule to observe at all times when researching among Muslim women. The individualised nature of the remaining etiquettes outlined above illustrates the extent to which stereotyping Muslim women is problematic in the research context. A professional etiquette of respect for the individual then, presumably a given in the researcher-participant relationship, should suffice for the non-Muslim male researching Muslim women.

In addition to the comparative ethnography of Medina and Hiqmah, further interviews were conducted with key informant 'Nasira' to give historical narratives of School A and School B (see Chapter 4). Prior to taking the post of head at School B, Nasira had also been head at School A for several years and had seen the school through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided

status. During one of the interviews I asked her to reflect on her experiences of non-Muslim men and their behaviour around Muslim women during her time in primary education. She stated:

In this school a lot of the women wear the *niqab*. They weren't traditionally used to having men coming in. Now they understand that as part of the state system there'll be lots of men. There'll be non-Muslim men, there'll be Muslim men. Muslim men understand the *adab* (general behaviour) and the relationship, and I believe most of the non-Muslim men that are coming in also do, in fact they're even more careful because they're frightened that they may put a foot wrong, and they tend to do *nothing* wrong.

The above extract illustrates the ways in which, although largely unnecessary, acute anxiety can affect the behaviour of non-Muslim men when brought into contact with Muslim women. The above debates have highlighted how preparing for research among Muslim women as a non-Muslim man led to the development of preconceptions, namely the central concern that the research process would have to be 'sensitive'. Reflecting on my experiences researching among Muslim women has illustrated that anxiety was unnecessarily acute. The two interview extracts above allow for the conclusion that in practice appropriate etiquette for interaction between the non-Muslim male researcher and Muslim women was individualised to the extent that a professional approach and respect for the individual should displace 'researcher paranoia' (Breen 2008: 25).

Researching Muslim schools in practice

Having discussed the theoretical considerations prior to the research process, and the ways in which anxieties proved to be exaggerated; I must outline the rationale for the research methods employed. As explained above, recognising

the complexity of ethos provided the rationale for the ethnographic case study, and the main methods employed were qualitative interviews and observation. My empirical research findings were also supplemented by documentary analysis of school mission statements, curriculum materials and promotional materials designed for parents. Retrospective interviews were conducted exclusively with Nasira on site at both School A and School B periodically between 2006 and 2008, and were the only source of data informing the narratives of the schools. My approach to interviews (as outlined below) was the same for both the comparative case study and the context study with Nasira. The comparative case study took place at Medina Primary following Ramadan over the autumn term of 2007, and at Hiqmah School during the winter/spring term of 2008.

Ethnographic interviews

Ethnographic interviews were conducted with members of teaching staff at Medina Primary, Hiqmah School and with Nasira. There were two reasons for deciding against interviewing pupils. Firstly, teachers and other members of staff in Muslim schools experience the school's ethos on a day to day professional basis, and so their insights will be of primary importance in understanding ethos within the context of a voluntary-aided/independent school. Secondly, one of the schools made it clear early on in the research that organising interviews with children would require an extra workload for staff. Formal letters explaining the purpose of my presence at the school would have to be sent out with an option for parents to reply if they wished their children to be excluded from the research. Involving children directly in interviews would necessarily result in parents becoming active stakeholders in the research.

Complications could arise, say, if a parent declared their child should not be interviewed, nor take any part in the research. This could result in confusing implications for conducting observation in classes. In the event that the process of contacting parents did not provoke any complications, administrative staff at the school would still have to identify which children to interview. In schools with intakes of over 200 each administering this process could indeed be time consuming. Thus, in the interests of symmetry in the research, children were not interviewed at either Medina Primary or Hiqmah School.

As discussed in the first half of the chapter, theoretical considerations prior to the research resulted in the development of preconceptions, most of which were unsettled in the field. These theoretical considerations and preconceptions can be reduced to one central inference: that the research would be ‘sensitive’ in its nature. In consequence, from the beginning of the research process, careful consideration was given to appropriate approaches to interviews. Given the nature of the political and media attention concerning faith schools generally during the research period, and on Muslims in particular following the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11th 2001 and the 7th July 2005 London bombings, an approach to interviews was employed which demonstrated awareness of the current climate. Fontana and Frey offer a useful review of different types of interviews (2005). They argue that whereas attitudes to interviewing in the past have centred on ideas of the interview as a neutral tool, more recent trends in qualitative methodology suggest that the interview is historically, politically and contextually bound. According to Fontana and Frey, it has been argued convincingly that the interview is not merely an exchange that

consists of asking questions and giving answers, but it is a collaborative effort involving two or more people called 'the interview' (Fontana and Frey 2005: 696). They refer to Scheurich's (1995) assertion that the interviewer is a person, historically and contextually located, carrying unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings and biases (Scheurich 1995: 241). Fontana and Frey argue that within this approach of *empathetic interviewing*, neutrality is not possible, and therefore taking a stance is unavoidable. They argue that those who adopt the newer more empathetic approaches take an ethical stance in favour of the individual or group being studied, and so the interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee (Fontana and Frey 2005: 696).

The arguments in support of empathetic interviewing appear to be more realistic than those which describe the interviewer as a cool abstracted individual who collects objective, positivistic data (Fontana and Frey 2005: 705). This is because Fontana and Frey take into consideration the fact that the researcher is human, and they also legitimise unavoidable occurrences (Fontana and Frey 2005: 705). For example, the perception of the interview as a neutral tool rules out the possibility of the interviewer laughing with a respondent or sharing his/her own thoughts on a particular issue, or changing the topic of conversation drastically. Saeeda Shah (2004) pragmatically argues that objectivity, implying neutrality and detachment, is not necessarily desirable on the part of the interviewer and interviewee (Shah 2004: 552). Shah's argument was of particular relevance for the research, as she concludes that 'there are possibilities

of misunderstanding, error and bias in every interview situation, which increase with additional variants such as culture' (Shah 2004: 552). For my study the concept of empathetic interviewing was useful because it takes into consideration the human interaction, and thus legitimises the agency of both the researcher and the interviewee.

Although empathetic interviewing was a useful concept in conducting my interviews, the tendency for the researcher to take a stance in favour of the cause of those being interviewed was more problematic for my research. This is because the main stimulus to my research was the scarcity of ethnographic sociological research into Muslim schools in England and Wales. My argument that the discussion of Muslim schools in the current faith schools debate is uninformed sufficiently with insights from qualitative research made it illogical for to attempt to take sides on the recurring question 'are faith schools socially divisive?' Having constructed this argument, it would be illogical for me to attempt to engage with the recurring theme 'can we justify faith schools?' Consequently, while I adopted an empathetic stance, the research was not informed by a personal conviction concerning the necessity or desirability of Muslim schools *per se*, or of publicly funded Muslim schools in particular.

The interviews were predominantly unstructured in nature, particularly during early stages of the research. Fontana and Frey use an example of Malinowski's approach to research as a means of drawing the distinction between structured and unstructured interviews. According to a diary entry, Malinowski documented becoming annoyed when some of the locals laughed at his

questions, and secondly documented talking to villagers about war. Fontana and Frey state that Malinowski committed what structured interviewers would see as two capital offences, firstly he answered questions asked by respondents and secondly, he let his emotions influence him, and thus deviated from the “ideal” of a cool, distant and rational interviewer (Fontana and Frey 2005: 705). They continue by arguing that Malinowski’s example captures the difference between structured and unstructured interviewing, as the former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behaviour within pre-established categories, whereas the latter attempts to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any *a priori* categorisation that may limit the field of enquiry (Fontana and Frey 2005: 706). For this reason I conducted largely semi-structured interviews. Owing to the lack of empirical qualitative research on Muslim schools in England and Wales, the areas of interest which emerged from my data during analysis could not have been predicted. As a result there were no *a priori* categories which could be employed with any justification. Therefore overly structured interviews, would have curbed the data collection process.

Having discussed the theoretical background and rationale behind the approach to interviewing that was employed, it is important that I explain the actual procedure. Prompt sheets were devised for each of the interviews and, after the initial stages of research, these were informed by prior findings. For example, typically when interviewing a teacher I would refer to a particular session of observation in her class (see the discussion of Agar below). Pole and Lampard argue that many researchers deploy a combination of structured and unstructured

approaches during the same interview, as some questions may require a short, standardised or numerical response, where others may require an expansive response from the interviewee (2000: 128). Examples of this arose repeatedly during the research process. During interviews there were numerous examples of the interview fluctuating from structured to unstructured and vice versa. For example, on one occasion when I asked Nasira how many children at School A were not representative of the local Pakistani community, the answer was ‘two’, and a discussion of South Asian communities, the history of migration, and differentiation between religious and ethnic groups followed. Consistently with Pole and Lampard (2000: 128), fluctuation between a structured and unstructured approach in the interviews was employed, giving scope for interviewees to introduce topics through two-way *empathetic* interviews.

The ways in which prompt sheets for the interviews were devised developed over time. Prompt sheets became more focused as relevant concepts emerged. The first prompt sheet for the interview with the head of Medina Primary arose from issues, conflicts and limitations in existing literature concerning faith-schooling which had become apparent through background reading. A methodical approach was employed whereby interviews conducted during the early stages of data collection were predominantly unstructured until concepts began to emerge. As the process developed, emerging concepts laid the foundations for further interview prompt sheets. Subsequently there was a trend for interviews to be more structured and focused as the data collection process developed. It is worth noting here that the trend for interviews to become more focused over time suited the format which the research eventually took. Whilst the ethnography was

conducted over 9 weeks at Medina Primary, the research at Hiqmah School was conducted over a 7 week period. Early research experiences at Medina were invaluable in tightening up interviews and collecting data over a shorter period of time at Hiqmah.

As explained by Pole and Lampard, interviews which do not make use of a rigid schedule of questions, and in which there is a capacity for the interviewer to explore issues as they arise, are often seen as providing inside accounts of social phenomena with the interviewer and interviewee having a close relationship based on a conversation (2000: 131). My research experience prior to the doctoral research indicated that the tightening up of interviews developed simultaneously along with familiarity and subsequent rapport with participants. An ethnography of a Catholic primary school was carried out as the original research for my MSc dissertation and later informed a peer reviewed journal publication (see Breen 2009a). Consistently with Burgess (1988), earlier interviews during both my MSc and doctoral research were concerned with asking numerous questions and largely consisted of the teacher talking to me as an 'informant' (Burgess 1988: 138). For Burgess, prompts for interviews which occurred later on were more concerned with challenging a respondent on certain recurring issues. During the research at Medina and Hiqmah it was later interviews which were more likely to take the form of two way conversations. During this time prompt sheets became more focused, as lists of searching questions gave way to pointers concerning issues which laid the foundation for informed two way conversations.

As demonstrated above, a conversational approach to interviews was employed in conducting largely empathetic, semi-structured interviews. In referring to interviews as ‘conversations’, Burgess (1988) promotes a naturalistic approach to research, arguing that in educational research, it is important to develop the conversational style with participants, or ‘informants’ as a means of gaining access to information (Burgess 1988: 138). Referring to interviews as conversations implies the kind of two way relationship between the researcher and the informant discussed by Fontana and Frey (2005). Consistently with Burgess, a conversational style was employed with the intention that it would encourage participants to volunteer information (Burgess 1988: 138). The theoretical considerations prior to the research, plus the fact that the majority of interviewees were Muslim women, empowered participants as informers. Although I had been anxious that my gender would lead to problems in the field (see the discussions concerning gender above), I considered that the conversational style was a necessary facet of developing rapport with female interviewees.

Participant observation

In addition to interviews, access was negotiated to conduct participant observation at both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Observation took place during classes at both schools in the comparative case study, and also assemblies and prayers at Medina. Observation was of central importance in establishing the ‘real-life context’ to which Yin (2003) refers, and contextualised each ‘case’ of Muslim schooling. This process is demonstrated in the example given above whereby observation notes informed prompt sheets prior to interviewing class

teachers. Another example was my observation of prayers prior to my discussing with a teacher the process by which children learn to practise Islam. Qualitative interviews collect data which is entirely comprised of the spoken word, or ‘talk’ (Agar 1996: 161), whereas the use of observation helped to broaden the spectrum of data collection to include non-verbal interaction, the layout of classrooms, group behaviour, collective worship, and visual trends. A good example of this was the issue of whether or not the *hijab* (headscarf for girls) was compulsory in each school. The level of observance was immediately obvious to me when I entered classrooms. However, on the basis of interviews with teachers, without conducting observation, the level of observance would have been harder to establish.

Fieldnotes were taken as the primary means of collecting data from observation. Throughout the research process I also kept an audio diary in which I recorded accounts of the day’s events. As audio diary entries were recorded accounting events retrospectively, their primary purpose was to inform the overall development of the research. Fieldnotes taken in the class provided the most concrete record of observation conducted. Scholars express mixed views on the usefulness of fieldnotes in data collection. For example, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that fieldnotes represent relatively concrete descriptions of social processes in their contexts (1995: 175). They proceed to argue that sound academic practice is necessary if fieldnotes are to be of any use, arguing that poor note taking in recording observation is like using an expensive camera with poor quality film (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 175). Agar (1996) has a more critical perspective on fieldnotes. Through stressing the importance of the

relationship between observation and interviews, he argues that fieldnotes should only ever be used as a means to an end, either in contextualising a previous interview, or setting the agenda for the next (Agar 1996: 161). The central theme of Agar's argument is that that when employing observation and interviews, they interact with each other simultaneously or sequentially in ethnographic research (Agar 1996: 158). Thus interviews provide a context for observational research, yet they also provide an arena within which to discuss what has been observed (Agar 1996: 161). He accepts that observation is critical for understanding and providing accounts of events, but that if observation is conducted before any interviews have taken place, then the researcher has yet to establish what the relevant concepts are, and thus has no idea of what to record (Agar 1996: 161).

Chronologically the earliest stages of the research took place at Medina Primary in the autumn term 2007. Following an initial interview with the head clarifying the terms of access, the first stages of data collection were sessions of observation in the classroom. This experience highlighted the nature of the relationship between interviews and observation in practice. The interview with the head had raised some areas of interest which informed the focus of early observation sessions. As the interview was conducted prior to any other fieldwork the topics raised were simply 'working topics' (for example, the use of Arabic in the classroom) which developed or changed over time, constantly informed by developments in the data collection. Although Agar's argument focuses on a critique of fieldnotes it can also be applied just as easily to semi-structured interviews. Prompt sheets/interview schedules which are devised before the data collection has begun cannot possibly predict what the relevant

concepts are going to be. This particular limitation which Agar has associated with observation is relevant to the early stages of data collection in ethnographic research in general, and thus does not stand as a criticism of observation alone, or the use of fieldnotes in data analysis.

Agar develops his criticism of fieldnotes, through arguing that in observational research, notes have to be made, and therefore time has to be taken to write. This inevitably draws the attention of the researcher from observing what is happening, to writing what has just happened. While the researcher is writing notes to record observations, his/her concentration is elsewhere (Agar 1996: 161). Agar infers from this that fieldnotes can only ever offer 'patchy' data (Agar 1996: 161). His criticisms are interesting because he is less critical of the concept of observation itself, but is more concerned with inherent problems in *accessing* what has been observed so that it can be tapped, accurately, as data later on.

Agar's solution to this problem with fieldnotes is that 'talk' (i.e. qualitative interviews) should be central to research (Agar 1996: 161). There is an inherent problem with this assumption which derives from the argument that all research is flawed. Any social science research inherently involves a researcher or researchers, and as such is human-dependent. For example, even statistical tests are chosen on quantitative datasets based on theoretical assumptions and currently accepted models of best practice. Similarly, researchers are reliant on the responses of humans in social science research. Agar regards 'tape-recorded' accounts of interviews as solid, reliable sources of data. However, if we are to

accept that all research is dependent on humans, it is unclear how relying on the researcher's memory for the construction of fieldnotes is any less accurate than relying on the memory of the interviewee. As an empirical social scientist one is dependent on memory when using the medium of interviews or observation for data collection. As a result it is not useful to play one approach off against the other as a means of establishing which approach is more reliable. The strength in Agar's argument lies in the emphasis placed on a relationship between interviews and observation in the ethnographic context, rather than the need to establish one method as more effective than another. The practicalities of the research environment should inform the researcher as to what data collection methods are appropriate in a given instance.

As discussed above, prior to the fieldwork, my anxieties related to the potential problems for a male researcher specifically in relation to Muslim women. Although they were displaced throughout the research process, at the earliest stages of observation at both schools some fears proved to have some basis. As demonstrated in the discussion above, my presence would prompt female teachers and teaching assistants who wore the *niqab* to cover their faces in classes. My intention was, as far as possible, to avoid altering the educational environment, but this was only possible to a point. At both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School the assistant head and deputy head respectively adopted the role of organising access to interviews and observation. The shortness of notice given, both to the teachers and myself, often resulted in my conducting observation in classes as the only male present with either a teacher or teaching assistants who wore the *niqab*. This process occurred more often at Hiqmah

School, although this may have been due to the higher staff turnover at Medina Primary as described above. Subsequently, I interviewed veiled women who were new to the school and asked about the children in their classes, rather than observing in the field. The above demonstrates the ethical complexities of conducting observation, but also illustrates how certain data collection methods may be more appropriate at certain times owing to the practicalities of the research environment.

There are some limitations in the resolve of Agar's criticisms concerning observation above. I have already argued that the practicalities of the research environment should inform the methods employed at any time. However the type of data that the researcher wishes to collect should also inform the methods used (Pole and Lampard 2000: 7). Certain phenomena cannot be comprehended through conversation alone. For example, during my interviews at both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School, the ethnic make-up of each school was a recurring theme. I was repeatedly informed by interviewees what the specific ethnic groups represented in the school were. However, witnessing and experiencing the school environment through observing the children themselves facilitated a greater *understanding* of what interviewees were communicating to me. Observation and fieldnotes then offer accounts of events that cannot be recorded in interviews alone, and in such instances, fieldnotes are the most concrete record available. This has implications for my resorting to interviews with the teachers who wore the *niqab* at Medina Primary in certain instances. However the practicalities of the situation are that interviews were the only way for me to collect data about their classes. In contrast to Agar, and drawing on the above

discussion, I realised that one should not aim to develop a hierarchy of research methods, but rather to select appropriate data collection methods based on the kind of data that one wishes to collect and the practicalities of the given research environment.

Using grounded theory for data analysis

There has been an emphasis throughout this chapter on developing the rationale behind methods not only from a practical methodological perspective, but also in terms of epistemology (for example, the definition of ethos as a rationale for ethnography). An ethnographic approach to data collection implies a ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1997, Corbin and Strauss 2008) approach to data analysis whereby concepts emerge during data analysis. Data collected from empathetic interviews and observation allowed for a ‘grounded theory’ approach to data analysis. This in turn allowed for the depth and scope necessary to discuss emerging concepts (see Chapters 6 and 7 for an in-depth analysis of findings from Medina Primary and Hiqmah School respectively).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe data analysis as involving coding, the process of taking raw data and raising it to the conceptual level (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 66). This involves interacting with the data using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between the data, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 66). For Corbin and Strauss, being an analyst means using common sense and

making choices about when and what bits of data to ask questions about (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 71). Analysts have to follow their instincts about what seems important in data and continue from there. Corbin and Strauss argue that there is no right or wrong in this approach to data analysis, nor is there a set of rules or procedures that must be followed. Analysis is largely intuitive and requires trusting the self to make the right decisions (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 71).

Corbin and Strauss' conviction that analysis is intuitive and requires the researcher to trust themselves in making the right decisions, was the underlying reason why NVivo was not used for data analysis. The benefits and limitations of using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo are increasingly being discussed in methodological debate. For example, fervent critics have argued that CAQDAS programmes can assist the analyst in organising documents, categorising them and facilitating searches within documents. However, the process of interpreting and building results from categories and developing the relationships between them has to come from the researcher (Carvajal 2002: [9]), and so computers and CAQDAS programmes do not and can not *analyse* data (Roberts & Wilson 2002: [21], Carvajal 2002: [9], Kelle 1995: 3). Roberts and Wilson (2002) go as far to argue that CAQDAS and qualitative research have developed from opposing philosophical standpoints. They argue that there are fundamental differences between the philosophies which on the one hand underpin information and communication technology (ICT) and on the other the philosophical thinking behind qualitative research (Roberts & Wilson 2002 [5]). From this perspective, computing technology assumes a positivistic approach to the natural world composed of

objects that humans can study, understand and manipulate (Roberts & Wilson 2002 [5]). Within sociology generally, this positivistic orientation encompasses the idea, copied from the natural sciences, that social phenomena can be counted, measured or otherwise quantified; and that there is a particular process that allows 'true understanding to be arrived at' (Roberts & Wilson 2002 [5]).

Roberts and Wilson argue further that in contrast to the philosophical position from which computers and CAQDAS have developed, the goal for qualitative researchers is to try and observe things from the perspective of human actors (Roberts & Wilson 2002 [21]). The conviction outlined above leads Roberts and Wilson to argue that it is not realistic, nor true to the purpose of qualitative research to expect a social phenomenon, described in language by participants, to be broken up, quantified and analysed in a meaningful way by a tool based on a positivistic orientation to the social and natural worlds (Roberts & Wilson 2002 [21]). Although quantifying and categorising the data is a legitimate part of qualitative data analysis, the argument posed by Roberts and Wilson is that ICT and CAQDAS will distort the meanings underlying observations owing to the positivistic orientation from which they have developed (Roberts & Wilson 2002: [21]).

In contrast to the above, those in support of using data analysis software argue that it adds accuracy to research (Welsh 2002: [7]). This can be achieved, for example, through using the search facility in NVivo which is seen by the product designers as one of its main assets facilitating interrogation of the data (Welsh 2002: [7]). NVivo certainly has benefits when searching through data for

attributes, as carrying out the search electronically will give more reliable results simply because human error is ruled out (Welsh 2002: [7]). However, interrogating the text in more detail can require more than carrying out searches electronically. Although it is possible to search for particular terms or derivations of given terms, the ways in which participants express similar ideas in completely different ways makes it difficult to recover all relevant responses (Welsh 2002: [7]). As a result it can be difficult to find all responses which relate to common ideas or themes because participants do not engage in conversations in uniform or predictable ways.

Thus, although text can be coded under particular nodes in NVivo, electronic searches may not reveal all the relevant points in the text for a particular conversation as relevant discussions which do not explicitly contain the search keywords slip under the radar (Welsh 2002: [7]). The search facilities in NVivo can add rigour to the analysis by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type, and can add validity to results by ensuring all instances of a particular usage are found. Nevertheless, electronic searching needs to be coupled with manual scrutiny so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated (Welsh 2002: [7]). Using 'manual' methods involves going through coded text as well as handwritten and electronic memos and making notes on how all of the themes fit together (Welsh 2002: [9]). This approach was observed by Gilbert (2002) in her study of researchers adjusting to using CAQDAS, specifically NUD*ST (Gilbert 2002: 216). Gilbert observed a process which she describes as 'the tactile-digital divide', whereby researchers adjust from coding on paper to doing so on the computer screen (Gilbert 2002:

216). During the period of adjustment, although participants used the NUD*ST software, some periodically printed documents to code by hand before entering the coded data into the software (Gilbert 2002: 217). Several participants also felt a greater ownership of their data when coding from printed documents which they could 'spread out' and touch in a tactile manner (Gilbert 2002: 217). Gilbert observed that, for those who persevered, the 'tactile digital divide' was a temporary discomfort followed by a synthesis of paper and computer methods (Gilbert 2002: 217). Most participants eventually established a combination of working on paper and working on the screen, mixing paper based and programme based coding (Gilbert 2002: 217).

Thus, the extent to which qualitative data analysis software is applied beyond basic use is dependent upon the expertise of the researcher (Welsh 2002: [9]). Writing memos within the software, rather than 'manually' (for example, by hand in a notebook) and linking pieces of data together through electronic memos can be useful when building up themes across the data (Welsh 2002: [9]). Whilst the 'memoing' tools in NVivo do push the researcher to draw theory from the data, in order to make sense of these memos, it is useful to return to 'manual' methods, going through coded text as well as handwritten notes and comments, linking all of the sources together (Welsh 2002: [9]). According to Welsh, CAQDAS should not be used completely independently of 'manual' approaches to analysis. The above argument implies that even when using CAQDAS, conducting analysis outside of the software package is essential, whereas the data analysis package itself is not. From this perspective it can be argued that using a combination of 'manual' approaches to analysis, both on paper and on a word

processor, liberates the researcher from being bound to any one particular CAQDAS package for all stages of the data analysis.

The searching tools in NVivo allow the researcher to interrogate data at a particular level. These tools can improve the analysis process by validating (or correcting) some of the researcher's impulse impressions of the data (Welsh 2002: [12]). However, the software is less useful in addressing how themes develop and emerge during the data analysis process (Welsh 2002: [12]). This is due to the 'fluid and creative way in which themes emerge' (Welsh 2002: [12]) when using 'manual' approaches to data analysis. When using NVivo, details can be checked on the content of particular nodes, and this process can affect the relationships between thematic ideas (Welsh 2002: [12]). However, in terms of searching through thematic ideas themselves, and gaining a deep understanding of the data, NVivo is limited simply because of the type of searching it is capable of doing (Welsh 2002: [12]). It is important then that researchers recognise the value of both manual and electronic tools in qualitative data analysis, and do not reify one over the other (Welsh 2002: [12]).

Drawing on the above discussion, the decision was made against using NVivo for data analysis in this thesis. The argument that using NVivo would still require using 'manual' approaches to analysis to develop themes in-depth led me to decide that 'manual' approaches to data analysis would allow me to apply grounded theory analysis outside of the confines of any one particular software package. In addition, it was felt that carrying out the analysis in this way would facilitate the 'fluid and creative ways in which themes emerge' as described by

Welsh (2002: [12]). It was concluded that ‘manual’ methods would be sufficient to achieve the kind of data analysis described by Corbin and Strauss as the process of taking raw data, raising it to the conceptual level and then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 66).

Expanding on the above, Corbin and Strauss describe coding as extracting concepts from raw data and developing them in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 159). The emergent concepts can range from lower level to higher level, with higher level concepts representing themes which tell us what a group of lower level concepts are indicating (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 160). Coding involves the researcher scrutinising data in an attempt to understand what is being expressed in the raw data. The researcher then delineates a conceptual name to describe that understanding. Coding in this way requires putting aside preconceived notions about what the researcher expects to find, and letting the data and interpretation of it guide analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 160).

Concepts can then be linked together into a theoretical whole, whereby theory denotes a set of well developed themes and concepts that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 55). The cohesiveness of the theory occurs through the use of an overarching explanatory concept. That overarching concept, taken together with the other concepts,

explains the what, how, when, where, and why of something (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 55).

During the data analysis for this thesis, themes initially began to reveal themselves when transcribing interviews. Although ideas, leads and indeed restrictions had informed and shaped the data collection process in the field, it was through transcribing interviews that themes began to emerge in fully coherent ways. At the earliest stages of coding, numerous themes appeared, spread across the data. As the coding of interviews continued, consistencies with emergent themes were found in the observation data. Some of these early themes developed dramatically as more of the data were coded. Other themes which appeared at the early stages of coding ceased to develop much. Over time relationships between like themes strengthened, and it became clear that in some instances groups of coded data were pointing towards a common lower level concept. Accordingly these codes were collapsed once a common theme took shape between them.

For example, at early stages of data analysis for Medina Primary, the theme ‘perceptions of state funding’ was coded. As the school had remained in the independent sector for an extended period of time, it was expected that explicit conversations about state funding and its implications would be a common theme in interviews. Similarly, data were coded under ‘remaining in the independent sector’, and early stages of analysis indicated that these two themes would sit independently of each other. Concerns about the opposition to state funding did reveal themselves, but it was done in relation to positive aspects of remaining in

the independent sector, and also in relation to some aspects of the curriculum. Accordingly, the themes ‘perceptions of state funding’ and ‘remaining in the independent sector’ were collapsed together.

A third theme, coded as ‘curriculum’ eventually developed to become one of the four key higher level concepts in the ethos at Medina Primary. A proportion of data which had been coded under ‘curriculum’, but which highlighted a perception of freedom within the independent sector was collapsed into the themes ‘perceptions of state funding’ and ‘remaining in the independent sector’. The result was a more robust lower level concept entitled ‘independent sector and perceptions of state funding’, and a more resolute higher level concept entitled ‘curriculum’ focused on the form that the curriculum took in the school. For Medina Primary, ‘curriculum’ as a higher level concept comprised the lower level concepts ‘*Qur’an* and Arabic’, ‘Islamic studies’, ‘Islamicised curriculum’ and ‘performance’. In contrast, for Hiqmah School ‘curriculum’ emerged as a lower level concept alongside ‘RE and IQA’ (RE refers to Religious Education and IQA refers to a lesson specific to Hiqmah School covering Islamic, *Qur’anic* and Arabic content). Together, these two lower level concepts led to the development of ‘educational objectives’ as one of the four key higher level concepts for Hiqmah School.

Thus, although there are concepts found in both models of ethos which appear to draw on similar themes, the ways in which these themes emerged through analysis determined their status as higher or lower level concepts. Within the model of ethos at Medina Primary, the school’s freedom with the ‘curriculum’,

as a result of its independent status, was the common contextual link between the lower level concepts ‘*Qur’an* and Arabic’, ‘Islamic studies’, ‘Islamicised curriculum’ and ‘performance’. Within the model of ethos at Hiqmah School, approaches to ‘RE and IQA’ and ‘curriculum’ predominantly emerged through the prism of the school’s overall ‘educational objectives’. Similarly, during the data analysis of ethos at Medina Primary ‘community relations’ emerged as one of five lower level concepts comprising the higher level concept ‘Medina: inside and outside the school’. During the analysis of ethos at Hiqmah School, ‘community relations’ emerged as a higher level concept comprising the lower level concepts ‘profile of staff’, ‘life after Hiqmah School’ and ‘intake and changes over time’.

The process of data analysis itself took the form of printing interview transcripts, identifying themes as they emerged with colour coded labels (a combination of coloured pens and self adhesive notes were used). Observation notes, memos and handwritten notes were colour coded with the same method. Once themes had revealed themselves fully and taken form, separate Word documents were generated for each of the higher level concepts in each school containing all of the lower level themes and data extracts which comprised them. An example of one of these documents is included in *Appendix B: Example Coding Frame*. These documents were very large, and as such only one has been included in the appendices. However, *Appendix C: Visual Models of Ethos* gives a visual model of how the lower level and higher level concepts come together to give a model of ethos for Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. The documents arranged by higher level concepts were again printed and analysed on paper, eventually

becoming covered in handwritten notes and self adhesive memos. These documents, along with separate handwritten notes kept throughout the data analysis, were used to write the in-depth analysis of ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. As this thesis draws primarily on a comparative case study of these two schools, grounded theory analysis was used to generate a model of ethos for each school, with each model comprising distinctive lower and higher level concepts. The comparison of these two models of ethos, along with an application of theories of institutional isomorphism is carried out explicitly in Chapter 8.

The above describes how the data analysis for this thesis was carried out consistently with the processes described by Corbin and Strauss, and the layouts of Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 demonstrate this. Higher level concepts are identified under which lower level concepts are discussed and come together to explain emergent themes. The thesis draws on institutional isomorphism as a theoretical guide to explain and contextualise research findings. However, as an original contribution to knowledge, the overarching theory is primarily reached through emergent themes in the data.

Conclusion

The rationale for the key data collection methods employed, and the approach to data analysis has been discussed. A conversational approach to interviews helped the development of rapport with interviewees, which in turn encouraged them to volunteer information. A largely empathetic approach to interviews was

employed as a means of moving beyond the methodological assumption that the interview is a neutral tool. Anxieties developed surrounding the perceived 'sensitive' nature of the research constituted a central part of the rationale for employing empathetic interviews as an ethically sound approach to data collection. Participant observation contributed to the process of developing emerging concepts and prompt sheets for interviews, but also offered insights into issues and themes which would otherwise have remained un-contextualised. Fieldnotes provided accurate accounts of data in their own right, and were fully integrated with developments arising from interviews. Displacing anxieties related to the insider/outsider debate through research practice represented a valuable experience in the pursuit of ethically sound research. Anxieties that proved to have been warranted demonstrated an inevitable aspect of social science research. The central aim of this chapter has been to communicate methodological transparency in the research process as a means of contextualising research findings in the chapters which follow. The above discussion has considered the theoretical assumptions underlying the methods employed in the research, and in doing so has illustrated the rationale for ethnography, more specifically largely *empathetic* interviews and observation, in relation to methodological and epistemological implications. The fruits of the research process are discussed in the coming Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 starting with the historical narratives of School A and School B as provided by Nasira.

Chapter 4: The Transition from Independent to Voluntary-aided Status: an Empirical Context

This chapter will provide a contextual point of reference for the subsequent analysis in chapters 6 and 7 which will focus on the in-depth case studies of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School respectively. This chapter draws on in-depth life history interviews which were conducted with a head teacher who had seen two Muslim primary schools through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status at the time of writing, and who had also, as a school governor, seen a third Muslim school through the transition. The life history interviews are not based on the life course of the head teacher. Rather, they focus on the historical narratives of the two schools that, as a head teacher in each case, she had led through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status. Throughout the thesis the head teacher is referred to as Nasira (meaning ‘victorious’ or ‘helper’). The decision against using pseudonyms in chapters which refer to staff at Medina Primary or Hiqmah School arose out of considering the nature of meanings behind Islamic names and the ethical implications that randomly ascribing names to large numbers of Muslim participants could have. The historical national and ethnic diversity within Islam and within participants in the research could also lead to elements of identity being overlooked when ascribing names, considering for example the historical dimension and implications of Gujarati surnames in relation to the caste system. In an effort to avoid a tactless handling of such cultural identifiers the decision was made to refer to staff simply by their role within each school (for example year 1 teacher, Medina Primary). As this strategy would result in the use of the

term ‘head teacher’, I decided to employ the pseudonym Nasira to refer to the head teacher interviewed for this chapter.

As a comparative case study subsequent chapters will discuss differences and similarities between Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Although alone this would give useful insights into ethos at the two schools, the life history study carried out with Nasira offers a point of reference which adds validity when comparing the two schools in the comparative case study. For example, if characteristics in family backgrounds are different in Medina Primary when compared to Hiqmah, it is possible to infer that status as either independent or voluntary-aided may be an explanatory factor. Nevertheless it is more difficult to argue that characteristics of families at each school are *necessarily* different due to each school’s status. However if Nasira’s account were to illustrate that the school intake in both schools she headed changed dramatically immediately following the transition to voluntary-aided status, then it would offer a point of reference to validate the above argument that school status does have an effect on the characteristics of families at Medina and Hiqmah. Of course the low numbers of voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales (11 at the time of writing, Association of Muslim Schools, UK) also add validity to research findings particularly when considering that the in-depth analysis of Hiqmah School is accompanied by in-depth insights into the histories of two more of the voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales. The main secondary implication of including this chapter as a contextual point of reference is that its inclusion means that three of the 11 voluntary-aided Muslim schools in England and Wales inform the original research for the thesis.

To simplify discussions throughout the thesis the terms ‘School A’ and ‘School B’ will be used to refer to the first and second schools that Nasira saw through the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status respectively. The life history interviews were conducted with Nasira sporadically over a period of two years at both School A and School B, and so observation data will also inform the narratives of the schools.

Introducing School A: Origins of the school

School A had been an independent Muslim primary school for between ten and twelve years before making the transition into the state sector for the beginning of the academic year 2004/2005, and at the time of the research the school was in its fourth academic year as a voluntary-aided school. School A had started out with eight children from three families in a small room in a Mosque, before growing steadily and moving location several times. Growth had been slow and gradual over a period of five to six years as word of the school spread between parents and prospective families. After growing to around 120 pupils the school’s intake stabilised mainly due to limitations on space, before moving to a different building to accommodate the children more effectively. Moving to a larger school building allowed the school to grow again from around 120 to approximately 240 pupils, School A’s largest intake as an independent Muslim primary school. On entering the state system as a voluntary-aided school the intake dramatically grew in size again over a three year period to around 420 pupils, with 60 new pupils joining each year as a two form entry school which

subsequently grew from the bottom up. Following the move into the state sector the school were able to have new school premises built as School A's third and current home.

Nasira's background and role in School A

As a trained teacher who had worked in the state sector over several years before moving on to teacher training, Nasira had extensive experience of the state education system prior to joining School A, her first Muslim school. The school itself had initiated the process of applying for voluntary-aided status and had called upon Nasira to offer guidance in light of her expertise in the state sector. The rationale behind inviting Nasira to assist in the application was for the school to draw on her experiences as a means of 'bridging the gap'. This would aid the journey towards completing the application process for voluntary-aided status, and developing a rapport based on trust with the local authority given Nasira's knowledge of the system. Nasira joined School A with a view to staying for six months and stayed for five years, quickly becoming head teacher and spending two years leading up to the transition and three years following the successful application for voluntary-aided status.

Nasira's personal background also formed part of the rationale for her involvement with Muslim schools starting with School A. The experience of seeing the school through the transition into the state sector, along with her personal experiences, gave her insights into the rationale behind Muslim schools. Reflecting on her own experience of growing up as a Muslim, Nasira explained:

If you look back a generation or two, my generation, for us, we learnt about our faith but, you practised in the home, and you practised when you went to the Mosque in the evening or supplementary school. You lived a sort of a twin role. You were children in a school, and you behaved in a particular way; you went home and you behaved in a different way.

Reflecting on her own particular background, Nasira suggested that the approach demonstrated above fitted the context of the time and had positive implications because children did learn about their faith. However, she pointed out that the Muslim schools which have been established since her childhood not only teach Muslim children *about* their faith, but allow children to *practise* their faith in an educational context without compromising either their faith or their education (see discussions in Chapter 2 pages 43-44 concerning the perceived dichotomy between secular education and Islam as a lived way of life). In Nasira's view the capacity to practise one's faith in the current educational climate further strengthened the rationale behind Muslim schools. Nasira explained:

Unless you're able to practise things, unless you're able to do it and you're doing it all the time then it becomes almost second-hand and further back... So coming back into it, what we want to do is to be able to take our children full circle back to where they live it. Living something teaches you much more than you ever learn about, you also understand the application, but it's not about knowing about faith - it's about practising faith in everything that you do all day.

Nasira's personal background along with her experiences prior to and during the process of School A's transition to voluntary-aided status gives a rationale for her own personal convictions surrounding Muslim schools. She maintained that this rationale was consistent with that behind Muslim schools in England and Wales in general.

Background of intake at School A

Initially the intake at School A was predominantly of South Asian descent but this changed over time. Over a period of time following the transition to voluntary-aided status, the intake of the school had changed in terms of both the ethnic background and other characteristics of pupils' families. Although the local Muslim population had been mainly South Asian, the number of Somali pupils at School A grew steadily over a period of two to three years with around one third of the intake being of Somali descent at the time Nasira moved to School B. Reflecting on trends within Somali families at School A, Nasira stated that there is an enthusiasm for their children to have an Islamic education which is demonstrated by the 'huge distances' that Somali families would travel to get to the school. There were approximately 24 languages spoken overall among children at School A as either first or second languages, indicating diversity beyond the South Asian and Somali communities.

In addition to changes in terms of ethnic composition, the characteristics of families at the school also changed over time, although more directly in relation to the school acquiring voluntary-aided status. Nasira explained that when in the independent sector both the faith-based nature of the school and its often delicate financial situation had resulted in a dependency on two particular characteristics in parents at the school. They needed to be either committed to the faith, or able to pay fees, or both if they were to obtain an Islamic education for their children. In exchange the school would attain the financial targets required to continue functioning. Although some parents would be on income support they would still demonstrate the extent to which they valued an Islamic education for their

children by choosing to send their children to School A. Reflecting on the limited resources at School A in its early days in the independent sector, Nasira stated:

I used to say they used to pay money to send children to my prison, because that's what I used to compare it to because of the lack of resources and the tiny rooms! But they valued something they got there that they couldn't get anywhere else.

On entering the state sector those characteristics among parents changed. Initially waiting lists increased dramatically, peaking at around one thousand at one point. The new increase in parental interest was necessary for the sustainability of a school in the state sector, as Nasira explained that a school needed to be at least one form entry, admitting one new class of around 30 per year, and with a total intake of around 200-210. Whereas in the independent sector it was, she said, possible to have a smaller intake, to be sustainable in the state sector it would be necessary to have an intake of at least 200-210 children.

Retaining a larger intake of pupils would become a cyclical process as one of the immediately obvious effects of the removal of tuition fees was that the financial commitment of parents to providing Islamic education for their children was no longer necessary. The primary implication of this was, Nasira explained, that many families who could not afford to pay tuition fees could now have access to the school. A secondary implication was that opening up the school so that anybody could apply resulted in interest being shown by families who might not have considered Islamic education for their children had it required economic investment and commitment. The implication of the above was that some

parents didn't have the same enthusiasm for their faith as families who invested economically in School A whilst it was in the independent sector.

Another effect of entering the state sector and amassing lengthy waiting lists was that the admissions criteria had to be changed. Whereas previously in the independent sector intake was based primarily on parental enthusiasm and willingness to commit financially, on joining the voluntary-aided sector numerous filters came into effect, reducing the number of prospective families. In Nasira's experience the admissions criteria typically came to prioritise siblings and pupils within a certain locality, with those living closest to the school taking priority.

The obligations and complex systems in place in the voluntary-aided sector, had a dramatic effect on the nature of the intake at School A immediately following the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status. The definition of ethos discussed in Chapter 3 referred to factors from both inside and outside the school, comprising inter-related strands. The dramatic change in the characteristics of School A's intake, as experienced by Nasira suggested that the characteristics of a school's intake may be central in distinguishing inevitable differences between ethos in independent and voluntary-aided Muslim schools. In the case of schools making the transition from independent to voluntary-aided, their infrastructure for the admissions process is fundamentally and necessarily changed as a direct result of entering the state sector. Nasira's account of changes in the admissions process provides an interesting point of reference

when considering distinctions between the intake at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School which will be discussed in detail in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Muslim schools in the independent sector: an empirical context

Reflecting on the overall process of entering the state sector Nasira explained that the process was fairly uniform. Initially either the community, the trustees running the school or parents identify a need, and this would usually arise in relation to an inability to sustain the school without a change of status. Alternative ways of maintaining the school, other than parental fees, would then be explored and the necessary enquiries would be made. In Nasira's view the sense of need had been a central and necessary prerequisite for making the transition in both School A and School B.

The specific position of Muslim schools in the independent sector was also a central factor in School A's decision to apply for voluntary-aided status. Nasira explained that in relation to the wider context of independent schooling, Muslim schools typically take the form of small community schools. Small numbers of Muslim families would become dissatisfied with the educational environment available to them and would pursue something different which took the form of opening a school of their own. Initially borne of the perception of *need* such schools could grow to a limited size, but there were boundaries within the independent sector. Nasira's narrative depicted a Muslim community with very limited economic resources in England and Wales, and therefore the financial requirements of maintaining a school would typically come only from parental fees or small donations. For example, School A was associated with a local

Mosque which did make financial contributions, but limited resources in the community as a whole meant that contributions were small and so fees and donations were the central source of income. In Nasira's experience, rather than having a stable base to build on, those Muslim schools that did persist in this context remained open despite limiting circumstances:

They run from problem to problem, they sort of remain open despite circumstances, rather than because they have the money to go on. At some stage they reach a position where they've got enough children to think: 'this could actually be a viable option in the state' you've reached a little core, but you never had the resources: you have huge staff turnover, you can't pay decent salaries, your resources are very poor etc. So you either have to look for sources of money, or close.

Nasira's narrative conveyed a conviction that Muslim schools within the independent sector could only grow to a limited size owing to financial limitations. When referring to fee-paying Muslim schools, the term 'independent school' masks the reality of their specific position within the independent sector.

Changing nature of School A's resources over time

Throughout Nasira's life histories of both School A and School B the conviction recurred that Muslim schools, owing to factors outlined above, faced a finite existence in the independent sector which could lead to a sense of urgency resulting in their applying for voluntary-aided status. Limited access to resources for independent Muslim schools was a recurring explanatory factor in the rationale for both School A and School B's transition into the state sector. The sense of urgency and need for School A and School B to acquire state funding in order to ensure sustainability is consistent with arguments posed by Meyer and Rowan (1977) concerning institutional isomorphism (see Chapter 2 for a detailed

discussion of isomorphism as the theoretical underpinning of the thesis). Meyer and Rowan argue that organisations which exist in institutional environments and succeed in becoming isomorphic with these environments gain the legitimacy and resources needed to survive (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 352). Nasira's account of School A's movement from being initially housed in a room in a Mosque to finally becoming a purpose built school illustrates the ways in which the school's access to resources changed over time as a result of acquiring voluntary-aided status. The above demonstrates how acquiring state funding resulted in sustainability for School A, as one of the processes of isomorphic change in making the transition to voluntary-aided status.

The first location for School A with its eight pupils was a small room used as a funeral parlour for the Mosque. The benefits of moving to the second building were that children had dedicated space to themselves for most of the week, only sharing it with the community for Friday prayer. The school was open for four full days, with a half day on Friday finishing at lunchtime, allowing the community to use the same space for prayer. In the evenings the building was shared with the *madrassa*, with large numbers of pupils from School A attending supplementary classes after school.

The moving of School A to allow more space and resources for the children was beneficial in several ways. Nasira explained that in addition to the increased space, access to more resources was also hugely beneficial. She stated that:

Having resources, first-hand learning, touching, feeling, moving, you actually understand what you are doing for the first time rather than seeing the words on the board and just sort of copying them down in your book. That makes a difference. The fact that for the first time in their

lives they're having trained teachers, who understand children and understand the process of teaching and how children learn, makes a big difference in the ethos, but the Islamic side of it has sort of carried on throughout and that has been reinforced with everything that's gone on around them.

The successful application for voluntary-aided status increased access to resources at School A to a further degree on entering the state sector, with the ultimate result that the school acquired purpose built premises (School A's location at the time of writing). Nasira explained that the Islamic ethos of the school 'took a battering' when first adjusting to having resources (on moving out of the Mosque and to the school's second location). However, by and the large the ethos had remained constant:

Going through some of those major changes puts extra stress and pressure on a lot of factors, but in the end things change. Fluctuations are much greater when change first happens and then they settle back down to some sort of norm.

The specific nature of provision at School A will be discussed in detail in the following subsections so as to give a picture of the objectives and environment of the school over time.

Specific values at School A

During the life histories there was an emphasis on the Islamic ethos at School A having remained constant for the most part throughout the transition to voluntary-aided status. On describing the specific values and practices that she felt characterised the school throughout its history, Nasira outlined a strong emphasis on prayer, on children practising their faith rather than simply learning about it, and on developing the *adab* (general appropriate behaviour in the

Islamic context) of the children. Nasira offered the well-oiled argument that for Muslims in the state sector praying at the appropriate times was difficult owing to the lack of provision and understanding within a non-Muslim context. Even if there were a level of provision, Muslim children would still have to step away from the wider group to pray in a small area allocated to them. A central part of the rationale for any Muslim school, as is demonstrated at School A, is the provision for children and staff to carry out appropriate practices, namely prayer, at appropriate times without the need to fracture the wider group. As prayer times change throughout the year, the delivery of the curriculum changes in accordance with a restructuring of the school day:

The prayer times change, if the prayer times change the whole curriculum changes, so instead of having this thing, this lesson in the afternoon we have it in the morning. If you need to pray later; it just sort of fluctuates through the day as you need to do it.

Provision extended to assemblies within which the focus was on the *duas* (prayers of supplication) and the *surahs* (chapters in the *Qur'an*) that the children were learning. Nasira illustrated that the lived Islamic ethos in the school was an applied way of life. The children lived their religion throughout the day reciting/remembering the specific *duas* at appropriate times:

When you enter the bathroom there's a particular *dua*, when you start to eat there's a *dua*, when you finish eating there's a *dua*, when you walk into a room there's a *dua*, when you leave the room there's another *dua*, so all the time you are thanking your creator for making you what he's made you. And therefore they learn them, they say them, so they become second nature. When you meet an adult there's a certain greeting, when you meet another child there's a certain greeting, when you sneeze there's a particular *dua* etc, so the ability to learn and practise them all the time so they become second nature, I think is what the ethos was. Joint prayer in the afternoon and then, actually, understanding the *adab* and their application, the rulings and what they mean in life.

In terms of the specific values that School A aimed to instil in its pupils, there was an emphasis on respect in several contexts which was inseparably interrelated to one of the core objectives of the school. Initially children were encouraged to have respect for themselves which meant knowing who they were as young Muslims, why God had created them and what He wanted of them. They were encouraged to show respect for others through the process of socialising with family, peers, elders and the community in which the children lived and to show responsibility for the wider environment as God's work.

Trying to break down the interrelated elements of the school's ethos in the life history interviews proved difficult owing to a philosophy at the core of the rationale behind Muslim schools, which informed the rationale for both the focus of the research and the methodology of the thesis, *Islam as a way of life*. In response to attempts to pick out elements of everyday life at School A, Nasira stated: 'The advantage is in a Muslim school you don't need to see it in layers like that, Islam pervades everything we do.'

However, reflecting on her experiences within the state sector gave Nasira a point of reference which highlighted the specific characteristics of ethos at School A which had not been present in the state schools where she had worked. Shortcomings of specific importance for Nasira were that Muslim children in the state sector did not experience the teaching of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* (ways and laws of the Prophet), nor did they learn the *adab*, two factors which she felt to be of key importance at School A.

The ethos at School A facilitated the open teaching of the *Qur'an* and *surahs*, the open teaching of the language of Arabic to give children direct access to books and resources in both the short and the long term, and also the understanding of the *adab*. The teaching of the *Qur'an* and *surahs* and Arabic took the form of explicit lessons, whereas the *adab* and lived experience of the Islamic environment were communicated by teachers acting as role models demonstrating appropriate behaviour to the children. Nasira summarised: 'So in anything where they are learning science, where they're learning English, whatever they're doing, they do it in that way; they're allowed to behave and live as a Muslim should.'

Ethos of the school over time

Having established the key central elements of ethos at School A, in light of the above account of the changes in infrastructure concerning admissions and therefore intake following the transition to voluntary-aided status, it is important to consider how entering the state sector may have affected ethos at School A over time. Nasira's narrative of the transition shows that changes inevitably happened (at least in the case of School A) and that the reasons were complex. The ethos at School A had always been based on a 'loving, caring, family environment' and, although changes took place, Nasira's conviction was that they were not always due to entering the state sector. The move to a purpose built school building had some effect as the school's two previous locations had lacked outdoor play-space. Having access to a playground for the first time was considered a significant advance as children could now develop and grow, both physically in terms of exercise and physical education (PE), and socially with

outdoor playtimes to break up the day. Nasira explained the significance of the new school building and the resources it brought:

Children need all kinds of things, not just education in terms of the knowledge base that you feed them. They need to grow physically, they need to have a place to run, they need to socialise, they need to do all those things. Those are things that they couldn't have when we were in the independent sector, so the biggest change for us was actually the building itself, to have space, to have space inside the classrooms, to have space outdoors, to get to see the sunlight, to know whether it was day or night.

Although it was a great benefit, the children's initial readjustment to having access to space gave rise to a difficult period in terms of the ethos of the school. Nasira's narrative depicted a period of change which was difficult as the children settled into a 'different ethos' directly related to the new access to space and resources rather than to entering the state sector. Moving children 'out from a tight space where all they can do is literally sit, and if you got up you stepped on the child next door to you, because in a room this size you would have 30 children sitting, all facing the board' to a purpose built school would have implications for ethos in any school. Considering the previous financial limitations at School A, such access to resources would not have been possible whilst staying in the independent sector.

Voluntary-aided status in action: the national curriculum

All schools in the English state sector must incorporate the national curriculum. School A, Nasira explained, already covered a 'slimmed down version' of the national curriculum prior to making the transition to voluntary-aided status. According to Nasira English, mathematics, history and geography had been delivered to a high standard whilst in the independent sector and were taught

relatively easily as knowledge-based subjects. Science was a little more difficult in terms of practical limitations: ‘we taught science rather than learnt science, the children didn’t have any resources so they didn’t get to *do* science and to handle things... They were taught knowledge, scientific knowledge.’ Subjects which required more practical application and resources were difficult to cover, and as a result subjects such as PE, design and technology (DT) and art suffered as the curriculum was more teacher centred rather than child centred. Nasira felt that a key benefit of entering the state sector was the wider base of the curriculum which was seen as ‘broad and balanced.’ Following the transition, School A accommodated certain extra subjects directly related to the school’s Islamic ethos by increasing the length of the school day. This allowed for all subjects, including Islamic studies and Arabic, to be covered in the school day, which began at 8:15 a.m. and finished at 3:30 p.m. every week day, with a shorter lunch break than traditionally typical in the state sector.

Approaches to Islamic elements of the curriculum had also changed over time. Initially peripatetic teachers specialising in *Qur’an* and Arabic would give lessons at the school, but after a while efforts were made to break that mould. Teachers at the school were given the responsibility to teach Arabic not only through lessons, but also through everyday repetition and use of the language in school life: ‘so as you’re passing things and you’re touching things or you’re holding things you’re using the Arabic word, because language is learnt by repetition and the more you repeat it throughout the day the better it is.’ Teachers were wary to begin with, but their confidence grew with time. However there was an anxiety because, when teaching the *Qur’an*, the word of

God delivered to the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.), parents wanted to ensure that teachers were using and teaching the correct *tajwid* (intonation of the voice during recitation). The words, meanings and interpretation of the *Qur'an* are of obvious significance, and so there was a particular emphasis on children learning and subsequently using the correct *tajwid* because these were the words that children would be using when reciting the *Qur'an*. Consequently *Qur'an* lessons were kept separate from the rest of the curriculum and were eventually taught by peripatetic teachers, whereas Islamic studies was taught by class teachers and by peripatetic teachers, with every teacher having enough subject knowledge and personal experience to deliver the curriculum.

Voluntary-aided status in action: Islamicising the curriculum

A key theme in the narrative of School A (and indeed School B) is an Islamicising of curriculum subjects not inherently related to Islamic provision i.e. national curriculum subjects which are present in all state schools regardless of whether the school has a religious character. Although Chapter 2 reviewed arguments concerning a possible dichotomy of 'Western' and Islamic philosophies (see Dangor 2005) as a possible rationale behind Muslim schools, Nasira's described an easy union between Islamic ethos and national curriculum subjects. Her conviction was that bringing the two together presented no problems owing to an inherent flexibility in the requirements of the national curriculum:

It doesn't say how things need to be taught, it says what children need to learn. Some of it is skill based, some of it is knowledge based. The skill based is dead easy. The knowledge based, you can teach from an Islamic perspective. You can say some people believe in the theory of evolution, so you teach it as a perspective. But of course *we* know that *Allah*

Subhana Wa Tala tells us through the *Qur'an* that this happened and that happened.

Nasira felt that reaffirming the Islamic perspective when teaching such elements of the curriculum removed any complications in delivering the national curriculum in the classroom. The above could give the misleading impression that Islamicising the curriculum simply refers to clarifying when science and Islam clash. In the case of teaching evolution, this was certainly possible and even probable, but in many cases science could be entirely incorporated into an Islamic perspective without clashing. Nasira explained:

Being able to refer back to the *Qur'an*... 1400 years ago *Allah Subhana Wa Tala* told us through the *Qur'an* that in the sea there are two seas running, there's a salty sea and a non-salty sea, sweet water and salty water, and these two seas never mix. And now scientists have discovered that it's to do with the density of the water and the heat etc, and you can refer back... so they're recognising that the *Qur'an* is a source of information and knowledge not just *duas* and *surahs* that you learn through repetition.

Islamicising the curriculum then refers to grounding elements of science etc in the Islamic perspective, so allowing the easy union in Nasira's account. This approach resulted in the children learning about their faith in a continuous process, rather than leaving it at the door when learning elements of science. Nasira's account illustrated that, as is consistent with the conviction that Islam is a lived way of life, the experience of learning in School A was filled with an overlap of interrelated factors, but with each giving some point of reflection on Islam. In describing the nature of the *Qur'an* and the ways in which learning about it could fulfil the requirements of the national curriculum, Nasira explained:

So we're going to learn *surah naba* [The Tidings, *Qur'an* 078]... There's the historical context, or there's the scientific context or, there's

something you're looking at in geography, you're looking at an area, you're looking at mountainous regions and you say the people of the mountain etc, etc, and this is what happened. Or, they looked at Egypt for instance and you were looking at the arid conditions and the river Nile and it bringing [sic], and you look at what that tells you and where it is. So it's sort of a cross linked... Mish-mash (laughs,) but a lovely mish-mash!

Thus, according to Nasira's account Islamicising the curriculum could dissolve a perceived gap between Islamic ethos and elements of the national curriculum and this would result in an easy union in the classroom. In addition to the conviction outlined above, and the decision to go voluntary-aided at both School A and School B, there was an overall feeling that Nasira's mission was to take Muslim schools into the mainstream. According to Meyer and Rowan, as institutional myths arise in rationalised domains of activity, existing organisations expand their formal structures so as to become isomorphic with these new myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 345). Thus, the awarding of state funding for Muslim schools such as Islamia (see Tinker 2006b) since 1998 now means that the prospect of the voluntary-aided Muslim school has become more probable. As was the case for Nasira and School A and School B, although sustainability becomes possible, acquiring state funding means that the pre-prescribed formula of the voluntary-aided Muslim school must be taken on. As a result, the national curriculum has to be incorporated into the ethos of the school as part of the process of isomorphic change.

Learning practices by example

The Islamic ethos at School A was not exclusively delivered through the explicit Islamicising of the curriculum described above. According to Nasira's account,

children were also led by example by Muslim staff members in the educational context, as well as other peers in external contexts (see discussions in Chapter 6 on ‘leading by example’ as a key higher-level concept at Medina Primary). Referring to children learning about the *Qur’an* and its delivery to the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.) Nasira explained:

They learn in everyday life because their parents are doing it, they’re told at the Mosque, they’re told at the school, and when you teach the *Qur’an* you don’t need to go from 1 to 30. It’s not like a book with chapters in that sort of sense because they were delivered at different times and the compilation is different to the order of delivery and you try and tie it into what you are doing.

The above description of the many contexts in which children at School A may have learned about the *Qur’an* by being led by example is consistent with the definition of ethos outlined in the methodology. In defining ethos as, although possessing many other dimensions, ‘something that is definable by outcomes or intentions as distinct,’ (see Chapter 3 page 68) School A’s ethos can be seen to have been characterised not only by values promoted within the school and by Islamicising the curriculum, but also by older Muslim peers in the children’s wider social networks. As children are led by example outside the school they consequently contribute to the ethos themselves by bringing experience of Islamic values in from outside.

Whilst it was evident that being influenced and learning by example was common for older children at School A, Nasira explained that younger children needed to be taught more explicitly. Within the context of an Islamic ethos, young children could be given a rationale for why they should behave a certain way, for example being told not to push and to wait for their turns when standing

in lines etc, and this would be reiterated to them by their older peers in wider social networks as they grew. Nasira commented that the above represented a process whereby young children were initially taught explicitly, until the explicit support was withdrawn as behaviours ‘became second nature’. The above can be seen to summarise the interrelated nature of ethos and children’s experiences of Islamic values inside and outside of the school.

Language in everyday school life and appointing non-Muslim staff

Within the context of the school the use of the Arabic language was one of the more identifiable ways in which the staff led children to learn about their faith by example. The use of Arabic phrases such as *masha’Allah* (‘well done,’ when someone has acted appropriately) and *insh’Allah* (God willing) was a consistent factor in the ethos at School A from the school’s inception. A later feature subsequent to the school’s transition to voluntary-aided status, was the appointment of non-Muslim staff. The principle of leading children by example initially seemed inconsistent with having non-Muslim staff. If, for example, non-Muslims were appointed as members of teaching staff it could be argued that potentially whole cohorts of children would miss out on being led by example in the classroom for a year. However, Nasira’s insisted that being led by example was a key element of School A’s Islamic ethos. According to her account, non-Muslim staff members were encouraged to use Arabic phrases as a means of leading children by example. In referring to non-Muslim staff members’ use of Arabic, Nasira reported:

They learnt those phrases beautifully! And they used those phrases all the time. We had [non-Muslim teacher’s name], we had [non-Muslim teacher’s name], and lots of others. They came in on teaching practice,

and they learnt those phrases and they used them appropriately, they taught the children those phrases. And they didn't find that difficult or contradictory to anything they wanted to do anyway... And the children take to it, and the teachers take to it, and it becomes *normal*, it becomes habitual.

The non-Muslim staff members' daily use of a modicum of Arabic allowed them to lead children by example in their everyday experience of Islamic ethos. The discussion of the use of Arabic, the use of Arabic among non-Muslim staff and the importance of language in leading children by example demonstrates the complex interrelationships between elements of ethos in a given school.

Final experiences at School A

After three years as a voluntary-aided school processes and systems began to stabilise. Nasira explained that the 'expectations of children were quite clear and the children had understood how to react to the changes that happened in their lives: the widening of the curriculum, the showing of some independence, the use of the space, the long day, they were adapting.' On reflecting on her final experiences at School A, Nasira commented that although certain systems had stabilised, staff turnover remained relatively high. She elaborated:

There was a continued staff turnover, that's to do with having young female staff, and in the Muslim sector it's actually quite difficult because you get teachers who have completed their education, they're only with you for a year, 18 months before they marry, and our marriages are slightly different to the host community's marriages.

Nasira's narrative indicated that pregnancy typically followed soon after marriage and subsequently female teachers would periodically leave the education system for four to five years, or until their own children were attending school. The result of this was a continuous turnover of staff which was outside

the school's control. Nasira concluded: 'You learn to live with change and you build your systems and procedures around change.' Nasira's wider experiences of the education system in general gave her insights into how the school was perceived by education authorities. She stated:

The local authority found that very hard. In the majority of state schools, what tends to happen is you build a stable staff over a period, and you have staff that have been there for 20 years. It's not like that in Muslim schools and Muslim schools constantly change over staff. Authorities find that difficult but gradually they'll begin to accept that the way you set up your systems has to be different.

The above demonstrates Nasira's frustration with a perceived lack of institutionalised support to address problems specific to voluntary-aided Muslim schools.

Introducing the narrative of School B

Nasira's experiences at School A demonstrate that structural changes directly related to acquiring voluntary-aided status had implications for ethos at the school. School B was in the process of making the transition from independent to voluntary-aided during the period in which the life histories were conducted. Nasira's narrative of School B can be used to reaffirm and evaluate some of the trends discussed above by giving a fresh account of the process.

Background of School B

Similar to School A, School B had been in the independent sector for 12 years before applying for voluntary-aided status. It was started up in a Mosque, next to the current school building, with a small number of parents from around six

families who felt the state system was unsuitable for them. Nasira became involved with School B in July of 2007 following contact with the trustees. At that point the trustees had been working for a year towards gaining voluntary-aided status. Knowing that Nasira had already seen School A through the transition to voluntary-aided status, they invited her to stay at the school for a six week period to assist and offer guidance with the application process. In addition to heading School A through the transition to voluntary-aided status, Nasira had also played an instrumental role as a trustee of another school which had acquired state funding and she had ‘led all the negotiations and discussions with the council, though I didn’t head that school personally.’ Her experience in liaising with the council was an influential factor in School B’s pursuit of Nasira’s expertise.

Making the transition to V/A status

Prior to Nasira’s involvement the trustees at School B had consulted the local council to discuss necessary prerequisites for applying for voluntary-aided status. Although trustees at the school had initiated the meeting, at the point of Nasira’s arrival correspondence between the school and the council had broken down. Thus negotiations effectively restarted in September of 2007, following Nasira’s arrival at School B on 22nd July. The first priorities were to develop the building so that it represented a school to prospective visitors. Nasira’s narrative consistently referred to the condition of the school building as being ‘pretty dire,’ owing to financial commitments to other priorities when in the independent sector. Although conditions were not good, Nasira felt that this was a typical trend for many independent Muslim schools. She stated:

[School B] had not a single penny. Muslim schools, typically, if you go into any of the 120 that don't have state funding their conditions are pretty dire. They live hand to mouth. What they don't realise necessarily is that for a third party the first impression counts, and if the person can't even imagine it being a state school, they can't get beyond that to what you're teaching, what the children are learning, what the school has to offer, what the staff are like, because they cannot even see it.

The school building itself had changed dramatically in the year-long period over which the life history interviews were carried out. At the time of my last visit in June 2008, the building itself did resemble a school. Laminate floors had been laid, what was previously a hatch for the school office had become a large open office space neighbouring a medical room with a sink and bed, and classrooms previously void of evidence of the presence of children were home to colourful displays of pupils' work. Nasira's conviction was that, even though developments had been made swiftly over a short period of time, 'this now looks the best it can in the building as a state school.' Prior to the final inspection in the application process, to take place two weeks following my last visit, School B had been informed that the school would indeed be awarded state funding. However, their assessment in the inspection would determine whether they received it for the academic year 2008-2009, or for 2009-2010. On anticipating the school's inspection, Nasira explained that acquiring state funding had become a necessity for the school owing to the time and money which had been invested in meeting the necessary criteria required of applicants. Although she had been assured that the school would be given more *time* if it failed the assessment in the final inspection, Nasira expressed concerns about the future of the school:

That amount of work required to take something from here, almost at the starter, to a state school standard in the period of time, no matter how much time you've got unless you resource it funding, people, knowledge,

experience, it ain't going anywhere. Time itself is not a solution, it's what you do with that time that makes a difference.

Her emphasis on using time efficiently demonstrated Nasira's commitment to completing the transition as a step toward sustainability. As with School A, Nasira argued that acquiring state funding was a necessary step in ensuring a future for School B. An extended deadline simply meant an extension of the amount of time struggling to survive in the independent sector. Within theories of institutional isomorphism, it is argued that processes of isomorphic change make organisations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient (DiMaggio & Powell 1983: 147). As argued in relation to School A, and consistent with DiMaggio and Powell, acquiring state funding means that the pre-prescribed formula for the voluntary-aided Muslim school has to be taken on. However, for Nasira, her central concern for both School A and School B went beyond becoming isomorphic with pre-prescribed models of Islamic education in the pursuit of improved efficiency. Her concerns were rooted in the reality of the financial struggle she faced whilst in the independent sector, and an urgent requirement for economic stability. This attitude contrasts with the overall objectives at Medina Primary, at which managerial staff attitudes, for the most part, were that the independent sector offered liberties. Chapters 5 and 6 include a full discussion of ethos at Medina Primary including attitudes toward state funding.

School B in the final stages before voluntary-aided status

At the time of the last face to face interview with Nasira, the intake at School B was approximately 115 and tuition fees were set at £2,500 per year. According

to Nasira there were difficulties in communicating with some of the community, typically first generation migrants, concerning overall administrative processes at the school. As fees were set in the form of monthly instalments, confusion would lead some parents to keep children home for periods of time under the impression that this would reduce the overall cost of annual fees. Another trend was for conflict to arise with parents returning from overseas after lengthy periods (Nasira gave an example of 6 weeks) and still being required to pay the balance of fees. In addition, the community which surrounded School B was characterised by limited economic resources. To quote Nasira:

Two thirds typically are on some form of benefit and they've got two or three children here. Imagine saving seven and a half grand out of your salary - never mind theirs - to pay for three children to come here. It shows you how badly they want it.

Although the school's problems arose from a low level of economic resources in the surrounding community, inevitably fees had to be set comparatively high. These economic complications represented a necessary evil in the independent sector for Nasira, a problem which voluntary-aided status would overcome through providing economic stability. She described the conflict which independent Muslim schools face in relation to economic stability and moral obligation:

We will get eight or ten out of 115 paid. By the middle of the month with several reminders we're lucky if we've got half the fees in. By the end of the month with a few more strong arm tactics we manage to squeeze 80 per cent, 85 per cent of the fees out of them. The rest we know we'll be lucky if we ever get... Some children have moved three, four schools already... Sad, isn't it? How can you make a decision on money alone to say they can stay or not?

From Nasira's perspective the financial restrictions for Muslim schools in the independent sector posed a moral problem directly related to trends in the financial situations of parents in the surrounding community.

Nature of surrounding communities: School A and School B

In addition to the tuition fees the only financial support that School B received from the community came from the local Mosque (which, as in the case of Hiqmah School, shared its name with School B). However, the Mosque itself was struggling financially and as such could not make significant contributions. Nasira explained that the surrounding communities of School A and School B had differing characteristics. The community surrounding School A had been relatively affluent 'in terms of a migrant community'. In contrast, the community surrounding School B was predominantly young, consisting of first generation migrants comprising asylum seekers and refugees. At the time of the research this community's principal concern was to raise the necessary funds to develop the Mosque, whereas the school was only a secondary concern. According to Nasira, elders in the community were between only 30 and 35 years of age, and as a result the responsibilities of community leadership were new to them.

In terms of ethnic make up the two communities were also different. The intake at School A was predominantly South Asian, the majority from Pakistani families with smaller numbers of Gujarati and Bengali families. There were also a number of Somali families, comprising the second largest ethnic group in the school after children of Pakistani background. At School B the majority of the

intake, approximately two thirds, were Somali. This trend had been a recent development in the school's history, as it had been founded by a largely revert community. According to Nasira this community had been ethnically 'very mixed', but financial restrictions over a 12-year period of maintaining the school and the Mosque saw the founding community diminish. Changes over time included an increase in the Somali presence in the wider mixed community, which had recently invested a limited amount of funds into School B on the premise that the school would soon be voluntary-aided. The remaining third of the school's intake was described by Nasira as follows:

So here we're two thirds Somali, we have some African-Caribbean, lots of mixed marriages, Algerians, there's quite a mix, and in the families you've got some Irish families, you've got some White families, lots of revert families, got some Chinese families, from all over, the grouping is very different [to School A] here.

The contrast between intake at School A and School B further demonstrates the diversity of Islamic communities, and the implications this can have for the profile of a given school.

Comparing ethos at School A and School B

Consistent with the dramatic differences in intake, ethos at School A and School B also differed. Nasira explained that although there were some commonalities that would be expected, Muslim communities, and therefore Muslim schools, were not homogeneous. At School A the surrounding community were predominantly Muslims from second generation settled migrant communities who made conscious decisions to send their children to a Muslim school.

Families tended to be educated, and had more financial resources than those at School B. Nasira described by comparison the community at School B:

They've come from very difficult circumstances, yet in them we find such gratitude, such happiness, such contentment with their life... One of the things I would wonder about [School A] was that we gave our children everything and yet they didn't know how to appreciate it, because I imagine they already had many of those things at home already... Here you take the kids to the park at the back to do PE, you don't need to take a ball, you don't need to take a skipping rope, you just need to go and they think they're on top of the world! The ethos is different, but it wasn't our doing. It had more to do with their circumstances and their backgrounds and the difference in the makeup of the community.

The above comparison indicates indeed that ethos is comprised of differing interrelated strands, with characteristics of the surrounding community representing an important one for School A and School B.

The typical desires of parents at School A and School B also differed. Nasira's experience, she suggested that, (having been evident at School A), the focus of South Asian communities was on the reading, recitation and finishing of the *Qur'an*. For Nasira, this represented an emphasis on going through a process. Families at School B, by contrast focused more on the understanding of faith, with a heavy emphasis on the oneness of *Allah*. 'So you listen to the *duas* the little children know [which] are more than I know at my age, and that is such a pleasure in the morning listening to them in assembly'. Nasira concluded that the Somali community 'valued their faith immensely', and that they 'more than most, want to send their children to Muslim schools'. Consistently with this, in summarising the overall ethos at School B, Nasira placed an emphasis on understanding the Islamic faith and putting it into practice. She explained that,

especially for revert parents, it was important for children to develop an understanding of the faith.

Curriculum: lessons

The format of the school day was similar at School A and School B. School A began at 8:15 a.m. and finished at 3:30 p.m., whereas at School B the day began at 8:30 a.m. and finished at 3:30 p.m. with a 45 minute lunch break. Prayers were also incorporated into the shortened lunch break at School B. Both School A and School B aimed to fulfil national curriculum requirements through an Islamicised curriculum. Local authorities demonstrated an understanding of the school's needs and were satisfied with the school's approach provided curriculum content was not left out. Nasira, as the school's head teacher, was attentive to ensure that due care was taken in Islamicising the content. A music curriculum had been developed, focusing on singing and *nashids* with the intention that children 'appreciate the joy of the music rather than necessarily which mechanism they use to do it with, a lot of poetry, a lot of *nashids*, a lot of songs which have been converted to make [lyrical content] acceptable'.

As with School A, Nasira maintained that the union between national curriculum objectives and Islamic ethos was not difficult at School B. She argued that the balance of Islamic and national curriculum objectives was such that the Islamic ethos facilitated educational aims. For Nasira there was no dichotomy between teaching and Islamic provision. Furthermore, she argued that the conditions of Muslim schools in the independent sector were in themselves testament to parents' emphasis on the Islamic over the educational:

If you're willing to send kids to the conditions here, or anywhere else I've been in Muslim schools, conditions are totally unsuited [and] contrary to good practice for bringing up children, they must value it a lot. So for them the Islam must be first.

Nasira's argument is applied to parents at independent Muslim schools, and has implications for the overall research findings. For Nasira, parents are demonstrating a commitment to Islamic provision through braving the conditions of Muslim schools in the independent sector.

Curriculum at School B

Consistently with approaches at School A, specific *Qur'an*, Arabic and Islamic studies lessons were provided at School B as a part of the curriculum separate from RE. Teachers' approaches in the classroom assisted the overall integration of Islamic provision. *Qur'an*, Arabic and Islamic studies teachers were peripatetic and delivered the main formal Islamic education. One role for class teachers was to ensure that practices, or Islamic content which had been learnt in lessons, were applied in children's everyday lives. The rationale for this approach was to avoid the Islamic and the educational becoming separate entities. In addition to Islamic provision, RE was also periodically delivered with a focus on teaching about other faiths. Beyond lessons, the approach at School B incorporated visiting speakers to discuss particular faiths with the children. For example, at the time of the research, the head teacher of a Jewish school had recently visited as part of a focus on Judaism in the RE curriculum. Provision of Islamic and other religious content at School B took three forms then. Firstly, children were explicitly taught through formal *Qur'an*, Arabic and Islamic studies lessons delivered by peripatetic teachers. Secondly, class

teachers would then ensure that the content children had learned in these lessons was applied in their everyday lives. Finally, periodic RE lessons provided opportunities to teach about other faiths from an Islamic perspective.

Profile of staff at School B

As the main providers of both Islamic and educational content, the profile of staff at School B represented an important factor in the nature of the school's ethos. At the time of the final on-site interview, there were a very small number of non-Muslim National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 trainees, and the rest of the class teachers/teaching assistants were Muslim. The fact that most of the staff were Muslim was an important factor in the overall ethos of the school. Nasira's explanation was that 'staff here currently are all Muslims because you have to be fairly committed to work in a school for [a limited] salary!' The profile of staff represented a key theme in School A's transition into the voluntary-aided sector, and it was anticipated that this would be the same for School B. The pursuit of voluntary-aided status had resulted in a shift towards hiring qualified teaching staff to replace unqualified teachers. A long-term objective was for the schools to utilise the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) with the aim of training graduates in the local community. Through this mechanism community members could gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) through teaching on site at School B. A fundamental problem was that independent schools are required to pay to register for the GTP, and so, owing to financial restrictions, it could not be utilised at School B prior to acquiring voluntary-aided status. Having a fully qualified teaching staff is a necessary prerequisite for making the transition to voluntary-aided status, and so Nasira had

‘imported a lot of staff’. The imported staff were predominantly South Asian, and with their arrival the school had three class teachers with QTS and one with a High Level Teaching Assistant qualification (HLTA), which demonstrated sufficient experience to teach, although it was not QTS. Subsequently, interest had also been expressed in the surrounding community concerning the GTP. Although there had been an influx of qualified teaching staff in anticipation of acquiring voluntary-aided status, Nasira argued that young female graduates in the community

[have] got to do the GTPs, for the community to have that sort of footing. It’s the people from the community that must lead the community and work in the community. That way you get some strength.

From this it is clear that Nasira’s vision was to generate interest in the local Muslim community and to re-integrate School B with the surrounding community through the GTP as part of the process of acquiring voluntary-aided status.

Adjustment on entering the V/A sector

The discussion above indicates that the main benefit of acquiring voluntary-aided status would be financial sustainability for School B. According to Nasira, the first stages of this process would be for the school to grow to one form entry, admitting around 30 pupils per academic year. At the time of the interviews the nursery had approximately 18 children, reception held 28 to 30 pupils, years 1 and 2 were taught together as a key stage 1 class of 30 pupils. Years 3 and 4 were taught together as a single lower key stage 2 class of 26, and years 5 and 6 (12 pupils in all) were taught together as an upper key stage 2 class. Nasira

explained that in growing to one-form entry size the school's intake would have to increase from 115 to 210, thereby nearly doubling in size. Oversubscribed waiting lists, along with general interest from the surrounding community, indicated that the prescribed growth was feasible. However facilitating it would require an increase in resources. Nasira's plan was to install two mobile classroom units at the rear of the school to accommodate the necessary growth.

Although the planning for expansion had taken place in anticipation of a successful application for voluntary-aided status, Nasira remained cautious about an overly positive reaction to the transition from stakeholders:

What we all see immediately are the benefits. We understand what we're going to get from the move. What we don't understand is the implication of getting those things. For parents the immediate problems are timekeeping, attendance, understanding their children might be learning things that they wouldn't necessarily want them to learn immediately... They find it such a shock to the system that the absence rate needs to drop significantly, that people chase up when you don't come and that you can't just go abroad despite the fact that the reasons you're going are very genuine.

In Nasira's experience the 'systems, the structures, the procedures are a shock to the system' for parents. Similarly teaching staff would also be affected by increased paperwork, accountability and workload. On entering the state sector, the school as a whole also becomes accountable to the local authority. Responsibilities include maintaining accurate data records and efficient administrative processes: 'Learning the system, understanding what it is, understanding what's going to be required when, what paperwork needs to be done, what the authority are going to need from you is quite difficult'. Drawing on experiences at School A, Nasira recalled that, whilst the process of acquiring voluntary-aided status represented a struggle, the following transitional three to

four year period was more challenging. Although financial restrictions were reduced, a lack of experience - along with staff having become accustomed to processes in the independent sector - had led to a difficult period of adjustment at School A. For Nasira the economic benefits of entering the state sector were important in securing sustainability for Muslim schools, but the inadequacy of strategic planning and support networks in the local authority had caused problems during early stages of adjustment.

At the time of the final interviews with Nasira at School B, the process of application was nearing completion. Each day a number cut out of coloured acetate was mounted inside the front window of the school counting down the number of days left until the assessment on the 17th June 2008 (the number '12' was mounted on my last visit). Owing to the financial commitments of running the school in general, and in preparing for the assessment, Nasira's conviction was that an unsuccessful application would mean closure for the school. A recent donation from the local council had been helpful, but ultimately the school's and the community's financial resources had expired by May 2008. Meeting the criteria for assessment had therefore become of paramount importance. Nasira outlined the process:

The main ones they're going to judge [are] the teaching, the learning, the assessment, the planning, the feedback of the assessment into the planning, the pupil tracking systems. The trained teachers have only been here since the 28th of April. I'm going to be judged on *a month's teaching*.

Other priorities included renovation of the school building to meet with health and safety requirements. Although faced with the prospect of achieving the necessary requirements with no remaining financial resources, and the school

possibly facing closure, Nasira remained positive. Her struggle for sustainability had been unflagging. At the end of my final visit to School B Nasira's parting words were, 'The impossible we do every day, miracles take a bit longer!' Telephone interviews with Nasira a fortnight later confirmed that School B had been awarded voluntary-aided status as of the start of the academic year 2008-2009.

Concluding analysis of the narratives of School A and School B

Nasira's narratives of the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status give important insights into interrelationships between factors in school ethos and the processes by which these interrelationships were fundamentally affected on acquiring voluntary-aided status. The process of entering the state sector gave financial stability to School A and School B and ensured the sustainability of the schools. However, acquiring voluntary-aided status also resulted in a snowball effect resulting in multiple examples of how processes of institutional isomorphism affected the infrastructure of both schools. Drawing on DiMaggio and Powell's typology, processes of isomorphic change predominantly took the form of both mimetic and normative isomorphism DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991). DiMaggio and Powell argue that uncertainty is a powerful force that encourages imitation through processes of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 69). Organisational models emerge as a response to uncertainty, and unstable institutions may knowingly or unknowingly adopt these models in the pursuit of stability (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 69). A recurring reason behind Nasira's decision to apply for voluntary-aided status at both School A and

School B is economic instability and uncertainty over the sustainability of the schools in the independent sector. Working towards fulfilling the requirements of voluntary-aided status in both schools is a clear example of mimetic isomorphism in practice. Nasira's concept of a sustainable model was the voluntary-aided Muslim school, towards which she worked to transform School A and School B. In addition, Nasira herself was the conduit for School A and School B to adopt these models, and she has since moved on from both schools. Processes of mimetic isomorphism also had implications for normative isomorphism at School A and School B. Acquiring voluntary-aided status in the case of School A required a change in admissions policies which had a profound impact on intake. Although the removal of fees opened the school up to Muslim parents who desired an Islamic education for their children but could not afford to pay for it in the independent sector, it also inevitably opened the school up to parents who would not have considered an Islamic education for their children unless it was free. The change in admissions policies also resulted in space and place becoming deciding factors in who attended the school with the majority of the intake quickly coming to consist of local families, rather than of committed parents travelling from varied destinations. Siblings also take priority following the shift, and where economic limitations previously meant that only the financially committed could secure places for all of their children, whole families of local children can now attend.

The new economic dimension meant there was a significant increase in access to resources, in the size of the school building for School A, and ultimately an increase in intake at both School A and School B. However, more specifically,

changes in admissions policy was one of the key processes of isomorphic change consistent with normative isomorphism as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991). According to DiMaggio and Powell, under processes of normative isomorphism, professionalism is as much assigned by the state, as it is created by the activities of the professions (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 71). Nasira's narratives of acquiring voluntary-aided status for School A and School B certainly represent examples of normative isomorphism whereby the awarding of voluntary-aided status by the state had a direct impact on the sustainability of the schools. Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell argue that one important mechanism for encouraging normative isomorphism is the filtering of personnel in relation to professional and skill level requirements for particular jobs. The change in the profile of staff represented a key example of normative isomorphism for both School A and School B. In both cases state regulations resulted in the appointment of trained teaching staff who will have inevitably replaced staff members who did not hold teaching qualifications. In addition to qualified Muslim teaching staff, this subsequently resulted in the appointment of School A's first non-Muslim teachers.

With particular reference to School A, although the infrastructure was isomorphically changed, Nasira's narrative indicated that there had been several factors which remained constant throughout the process. The high turnover of female staff and the Islamicisation of the curriculum were not fundamentally affected by the transition to voluntary-aided status to the same extent as the school's infrastructure had been through changes in admissions and resources. The concept of leading children by example remained a central priority following

the appointment of non-Muslim teachers through encouraging integration and the use of Arabic phrases when interacting with children in the classroom and everyday school life. Ultimately the ethos at School A had become a union between Islamic and the educational objectives, as resources opened up opportunities to teach more practical subjects such as art, design and technology, physical education and science. Referring to Islamic and educational objectives in this way does not imply that they are mutually exclusive, but it does identify two central influences on ethos in a voluntary-aided context as demonstrated by School A. Nasira maintained that the school's ethos had not changed following the transition, although she acknowledged that significant structural changes had occurred.

The eventful nature of School A's narrative raises questions as to the nature of Muslim schools in the context of England and Wales. In contrast to Nasira's conviction above, it is concluded that such isomorphic changes in infrastructure as those documented in the narrative of School A, and subsequently forecast for School B, must have implications for ethos. Referring back to the definition of ethos in Chapter 3, each of those elements of infrastructure could in turn directly refer to a 'strand' of ethos. The changes documented in this chapter can be seen to demonstrate interrelated strands of ethos undergoing isomorphic change in direct relation to a), taking the initiative to pursue voluntary-aided status, and b), successfully going through the process of acquiring that status. The processes of institutional isomorphism at both School A and School B imply that status, as independent and voluntary-aided at different points in time, had important implications for ethos in each school.

In conclusion, the structural changes which occurred during School A's transition into the state sector represent clear examples of institutional isomorphism inherent to the school's acquiring voluntary-aided status. Applying theories of institutional isomorphism gives grounds for anticipating that any independent 'Muslim school' awarded voluntary-aided status may well change markedly following the transition. This conclusion will serve as an important contextual point of reference when discussing differences between models of ethos in the comparative case study of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Comparisons and distinctions will be drawn in the comparative case study alone. However, consistency with the narratives of School A and/or School B, as schools which have been in both the independent or voluntary-aided sector, will contextualise comparisons of the role of status on ethos at Medina and Hiqmah.

Chapter 5: Setting the Scene for the Comparative Case

Study of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School

This chapter will outline the backgrounds of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School as a means of contextualising the research findings discussed in-depth in chapters 6 and 7. The analysis of research findings in later chapters will focus on concepts and themes which were important in influencing ethos at each school. Establishing details of the background of each school through setting the scene at Medina and Hiqmah in this chapter will contextualise the analysis of data in later chapters. The first half of the chapter will discuss the background of Medina Primary, whilst the second half will discuss the background of Hiqmah School.

Positioning independent schools in the English education system

Reviewing the requirements of independent schools will provide a means to position Medina Primary in the wider educational framework. Under part 10 of the Education Act 2002, all independent schools in the English education system have to register with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, now the Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF) before the school begins operation (DfES 2005: 1). According to the DfES, an independent school is defined as ‘any school which provides full-time education for five or more pupils of compulsory school age or one or more such pupils with a statement of special educational needs or who is in public care and is not a school maintained by a Local Education Authority or a non-maintained special school’ (DfES 2005: 4). Registering with the DfES binds independent schools to fulfil certain criteria

related to several aspects of the school's provision. Registration requires the school to submit documents illustrating how content focused on developing children's linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social and aesthetic and creative skills will be integrated into the school curriculum (DfES 2005: 11-12).

These regulations are not intended to be prescriptive concerning the curriculum, and they do not require the school to follow the National Curriculum. However, the school should give experience in the relevant areas (DfES 2005: 11). It is compulsory for all independent schools as defined above to be registered with the DfES/DCSF. Illustrating the requirements of independent schools within the policy framework reveals that although less constrained than voluntary-aided schools, independent Muslim schools in the English education system are still required to fulfil certain criteria. The extent to which independent schools fulfil the relevant criteria is monitored with compulsory inspections by either OFSTED or the Independent Schools Inspectorate to take place at least once every six years (DfES 2005: 24). These inspections cost a given school between £200 (at £40 per pupil for a school with 5 pupils) and the maximum charge of £10,000. There are also guidelines for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education (DfES 2005: 12). Thus, owing to registration requirements, independent schools are not as free to act as they may initially seem to be.

Positioning Medina Primary within the independent sector

Medina Primary is a comparatively small school in England's independent education sector. Traditionally independent schools are fee-paying schools and reviewing the level of fees a given independent school charges gives an insight into elements of the school such as size, boarding/non-boarding, reputation, prestige etc. An example of one of the schools at the high end of the fee-paying spectrum is an independent Catholic school which was originally to be the comparator school for Medina Primary in the earliest stages of the research design. This particular two-tier Catholic school (with primary and secondary level provision) had annual fees of over £25,000 in 2005, whereas parents at Medina Primary pay comparatively little at £1,250-£1,400 per year. Medina Primary then is on the lower end of the fee-paying spectrum within the context of the independent education sector in England and Wales.

Buildings and organisation

The comparatively low fees at Medina Primary reflect certain characteristics of the school to an extent. The school is based in a main building with two mobile units located behind the playground. The main building houses the *Masjid* (prayer room), reception area, the secretary's office, the children's cloakroom area, two classrooms on one corridor for foundation 1 and foundation 2 (nursery), and two classrooms on a parallel corridor for years 1 and 2. Classrooms for years 3 and 4 are in a mobile unit located behind the main school building, and years 5 and 6 are based in a mobile unit to the side of the main school building. Although a small sized building, Medina Primary is a one form entry school admitting around 30 pupils to year 1 each year and catering for

around 230 pupils in total (the exact figure is constantly fluctuating and increasing as families on the waiting list fill empty spaces). However, classrooms are not crowded. A large proportion of pupils can be accounted for in the foundation one and foundation two classes, each of which consists of two groups, one attending in the morning and one in the afternoon. With an internal policy of having an absolute upper limit of 30 pupils in any one class, the foundation two cohort is halved each year as the classes, consisting of both the morning and afternoon groups, enter year one. Foundation classes alone then can account for up to 120 of the school's pupils at any one time. Class sizes of year groups 2 and upwards were typically between 20 and 25 pupils, reflecting a balanced approach to the school's dilemma of aiming to provide a particular quality of Islamic education whilst also having oversubscribed waiting lists.

Location of the school

All of the Muslim schools referred to in the original research for this thesis will simply be referred to as being located in England. The reason for trying to ensure anonymity is clear when considering the small numbers of Muslim schools in England and Wales, namely 120 independent and 11 voluntary-aided at the time of writing (Association of Muslim Schools UK). Although particular cities will not be referred to by name, it remains important that prevalent characteristics of the surroundings of each school are discussed. Medina's surroundings are characterised with an ethnically and religiously diverse community. Residents immediately living in proximity to the school represent a predominant mix of ethnically White families with some South Asian families (see Chapter 3 page 72 for a discussion of the use of 'South Asian' as a useful

ethnic classification). However, moving from the school and towards the city centre reveals a predominantly South Asian community, including a large Muslim majority, but also including significant numbers of Hindus and Sikhs. Consistent with that described by Ipgrave (1999: 149), this predominantly South Asian Muslim community, neighbouring Medina Primary consisted of first, second and third generation families of mainly Gujarati descent. Indicators of this are that Gujarati is a common second language, Muslim women both wearing colourful traditional dress and covering up in darker colours, surnames including 'Patel' which indicate a formerly Hindu ancestry. A large proportion of this community are migrants or their descendents (the majority) who came from Uganda following Idi Amin's expulsion of 60,000 South Asians in 1972 (Singh 2003: 42, Ipgrave 1999: 149). The history of migration in the community neighbouring Medina primary explains the presence of Indian, African and traditional Islamic influences.

Profile of the staff and intake at Medina Primary

The profile of the staff at Medina Primary represents diversity in the wider Muslim community not necessarily reflected in the school's more local surroundings. All of the staff were female with the exception of the head teacher and another male teacher specialising in *Qur'an* and Arabic (see my discussion in Chapter 3, pages 78-80 explaining the prevalence of women in primary education generally and in Muslim schools specifically). Of the female members of teaching staff three wore the *niqab*, while a large number of the female teaching assistants were also veiled. The remaining female staff members, such as the assistant head (curriculum), deputy head and secretary did not wear the

niqab, although all female staff members wore the *hijab*. There was some variety in dress among staff. For example, whilst the majority of teaching assistants who wore the *niqab* also dressed entirely in black, there were also teaching assistants who wore pink or blue *hijabs* whilst also wearing the *niqab*. The head teacher and *Qur'an* teacher also dressed in different ways with the head wearing traditional robes of modest colours (e.g. white or grey) and a small cap, and the *Qur'an* teacher wearing a turban with two tails with similar white robes.

As both the intake and staff at Medina Primary demonstrated ethnic diversity within the Muslim community in the surrounding city, ethnic differentiation seemed irrelevant for a school aiming to provide a distinct Islamic ethos. In relation to themes concerning ethnic segregation and 'ghettoisation' in the faith schools debate, Medina Primary's intake and staff profile demonstrates the extent to which a faith schools can be both distinctly Islamic whilst being both ethnically and culturally diverse. Taken together, the head's convictions about ethnicity, the diverse intake of the school, and the extent to which it represented the antithesis of an ethnically 'ghettoised faith school' explains why discussing ethnicity with most of the staff was difficult for the researcher. With pupils intake, there was a small majority of children from Gujarati families of either Indian or Indian-Ugandan descent, and approximately half of the school's intake was of South Asian origin. However there were also significant numbers of children of Somali, African-Caribbean, French and dual heritage families (these dual heritage children were almost exclusively of South Asian and White British descent).

Within the staff, a small majority were of South Asian descent. Included in this group were the assistant head (curriculum), class teachers for years 1, 2, 3 (part time) and 4, the deputy head (co-founder of the school and married to the head), two nursery teachers, the secretary and a number of teaching assistants. Among the staff of South Asian descent there was further diversity in relation to nationality and familiarity with certain languages. For example, the secretary was French and had English as a second language, whilst the year 4 teacher would frequently use common short Punjabi phrases in conversation with all members of staff. The secretary, year 4 teacher, and year 6 teacher, were all first time migrants from France, northern India and north Africa respectively. There were a number of staff members who may have reverted to Islam. For example, the *Qur'an* teacher's surname suggested British descent, at least two teaching assistants sported regional British west-country accents and a part-time year 3 teacher of White descent, along with the head, both had northern British accents. The above demonstrates the presence of local, national and global influences on the general environment of the school.

Medina Primary's history: Kinship and family-based origins

The two children of the head and deputy head were also frequently present which gave the school a sense of 'family atmosphere' which was commented on by staff in interviews. The daughter, as the older sibling, would help out in the office at least two days a week, whilst the son, approaching GCSE exams at the time of the research, was sometimes present after school hours. Having the head and deputy head and their children at the core of the school may have contributed to the strong sense of family atmosphere referred to in interviews, which

interviewees attributed largely to the school's independent status. In interviews with the head there was a clear emphasis on the unity between the staff and a sense of purpose with the constant common goal being the continuity of the school. The head felt that this was part of the struggle as a comparatively small school in the independent sector but, more significantly to him, as a Muslim school in the faith sector. Evidence of the commitment to this 'struggle' can be seen when considering that the head had taken a salary in the year prior to the research of £6,000 as the lowest paid member of staff. It is noteworthy that, unlike School B, at the time of the research Medina did not appear to be on the verge of financial collapse. The concept of the struggle refers to the aim of offering a standard of provision of resources to rival state schools of a similar size, rather than simply struggling to keep the school open each year. An underlying theme in interviews with the head was that state-funding would relieve this struggle to an extent; however in doing so Medina Primary would lose elements of its ethos which made it a distinctly Islamic school. This issue will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, first an account of the development of the school will be given in order to contextualise the ethos at Medina Primary.

Medina Primary's history: Starting up the school

The school had originally been started up in a small village in 1997. The head teacher had previously been closely involved with a Muslim school which made the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status, before moving on to a role with the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMS). The head also had occupied the position of governor of a nearby independent Muslim school and,

upon resigning from that position, took the initiative to set up a new school (together with the deputy head) which would 'cater for a need' (deputy head). The new school was located on the site of an independent Islamic education organisation located in a rural setting. The original site consisted of a mobile unit containing a small classroom and part of a staff room, access to a library and a neighbouring mobile unit as a Mosque catering for the whole site, which doubled as the school hall. Medina Primary was opened in September 1998 with four students, completing the academic year with an intake of 22. Growth in the school's intake was gradual, with 29 students starting the following academic year. This slow, gradual growth allowed the school to cope with adapting to functioning in restricted space over time. Support from the Islamic education organisation also helped with financial limitations faced by the school. In addition to providing facilities for the school, the Islamic organisation also absorbed numerous financial overheads in times of difficulty. Over time Medina Primary was given access to further facilities on site. For example, an unused office was given to the school and served as a staff room, allowing for expansion inside the mobile unit to include three classrooms.

At its inception Medina Primary was a fee-paying school with fees starting at £1,250 per year, which remained the annual cost for six years. The head teacher and deputy head met the cost personally for the first academic year's budget, taking on the responsibility for paying for resources and staff salaries with the complete cost for the first year being between two and three thousand pounds. The bulk of the year's expenses went towards the salary of the school's first qualified teacher, currently assistant head at Medina. The head and deputy head

were also proactive in maximising the school's status as a charity by contacting local schools which donated numerous spare and used resources such as desks and paper, further reducing financial costs for the year. During the early years at the first site parents also played a significant role in co-ordinating both large and small fund raising events for the school in order to meet annual costs.

Medina Primary's history: The changing nature of intake over time

The intake at Medina Primary, although initially demonstrating slow manageable growth, has changed dramatically over the lifespan of the school. When based on site with the Islamic education organisation, children were accepted into the school without families having to demonstrate an active interest in the Islamic dimension to the school's provision. The small size of the school, in terms of intake rather than available space, led to a particular approach to recruitment. In the deputy head's words the strategy was: 'we're a small school, we desperately need your children, please come'. In discussing the nature of the intake in the school's infancy, the deputy head explained:

I don't think it was entirely healthy for the school because, in many ways, sometimes I felt we were used as a baby sitting service, because the PhD students coming in from Saudi and Kuwait felt more comfortable with an Islamic environment than perhaps a state school. So we had children coming in from [a nearby town] but parents didn't quite take [Medina Primary] as seriously as they should have, because the children used to go to [a supplementary Islamic] school. Children from Saudi need to keep abreast of their curriculum so that when they go back they will go into the class that the age dictates, otherwise they'll put them right back regardless of their age... so that always took precedence over [Medina Primary]. I felt, we were just there as a baby sitting service... That wasn't very good for the teachers or for the school as a whole because I felt we weren't taken seriously enough.

At the point of moving to the current location of the school, the numbers of both pupils and staff increased. On leaving the village site Medina Primary had an intake of 84 children comprising six classes with one teacher to each of the classes. On arrival at the new site, located in the city, the initial intake was 200 children with eight teachers, although several teachers left shortly and were subsequently replaced by more qualified staff. The transition to a larger building had been eased by the new location of the school as the city site provided convenient access for prospective parents and teachers. Whilst at the village site a school-owned minibus had been employed to transport children to and from the school. Although some parents with access to minibuses continue to offer a service for children at Medina Primary, improved access to the city site reduced the financial burden of the school maintaining its own minibus. Interviewing for recruiting the increased number of teaching staff required for the new, larger school had begun over the summer period to allow for a smooth transition at the start of the academic year. This process continued in line with the departure of several staff members and afforded the opportunity to employ more qualified teaching staff. Although the school itself doubled its intake of children following the move to the city site, the fees remain close to the £1,250 of the opening year.

The deputy head explained the necessity to keep fees low stating:

We are a community school, a service. A lot of parents struggle to pay the fees. They can pay to a limit, we're now at £1,400. If it goes beyond that we're going to start losing students because they can't afford it.

The decision to keep fees relatively low is inevitably tied to the school's status as an independent Muslim school catering for families with average incomes.

State funding for the future?

The necessity of low annual fees, along with the school's aim of providing a high standard of education in an Islamic environment, had particular financial implications. One example of this was manifested in approaches to energy saving. The communal office and staff room both had signs reading 'please turn off the lights, *shukran*', and lights were only turned on when rooms were in use. Similarly, the photocopier/printer in the communal office was switched off at the mains for the majority of the time, and was only switched on to be used. Although financial constraints have been present throughout the school's history, it has functioned for a decade during which resources, such as toys for the nursery, desks, tables, books etc, have been the core priority. Yet at the time of data collection there was a newer interest in developing resources such as access to computers for children. At least three computers were in use by staff at the school along with two photocopiers. However, it was clear that state funding would enable the school to provide children with access to computers.

During a conversation about the possibility of state funding for Medina Primary, the deputy head expressed concern about being overly opposed to having voluntary-aided status:

After our OFSTED we went to [a V/A Muslim school] and to me I saw a Muslim school. ... The ethos was alright, and they had a varied background of parents and staff. So I think we need to look further into, the initial arguments of not going for state funding, do they still hold true today? That's my question that I put to [the head]. I really do need to do a lot more research myself and find out, because if it's right, if it's good and if it's going to be beneficial for the school, then we shouldn't hold back because, as we are here, I have to run a very tight ship. So, although I'm not saying yes we have to go for it - absolutely not - but we need to get some more information.

The above represents an awareness of available options for the future of the school. However, considering the prospect of state funding revealed a tension between two possible outcomes: preserving the existing ethos in the independent sector; or fulfilling an obligation to provide sustainability to more financially challenged parents through having voluntary-aided status.

Current profile of teaching staff

One area where voluntary-aided status would affect the school would be the qualification requirements for teaching staff. At the time of data collection, the educational level of the teaching staff for years 1 and upwards (nine staff including the assistant head [curriculum]) was at least university graduate level and above with five having either Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE.) The only teaching staff not qualified at university level were four members in charge of the nursery and foundation level 2, although collectively held the required qualifications for childcare at early years level (CACHE diploma level 3, BTEC national diploma, Childcare Diploma, and Montessori Early Childhood Qualification level 3). As an independent school Medina Primary is afforded the flexibility to employ non-qualified staff with the rationale that qualifications do not necessarily imply good teaching skills in prospective staff members. The head explained that interest from prospective teachers had changed over time, with more qualified teachers approaching the school. Financial limitations for Medina Primary as an independent school necessarily affected teacher's salaries with the result that 'you get very dedicated people' (head, Medina Primary). Although recruitment of teaching staff was not restricted to qualified teachers, the head argued that

quality of teaching was of the highest priority in both qualified and non-qualified staff. The head clarified the approach to recruitment:

Obviously we want the best and see that we can have very, very good non-qualified teachers, but we also have very, very good qualified teachers, and that boosts your credibility. So although I'm not averse to employing somebody who's not qualified, and would be quite happy to employ someone who's not qualified as long as they're a good teacher, having the qualification does help obviously. And so the salaries had to go up and things like that so that's a rather long winded way of saying that the fees have crept up.

Although throughout the research process there was an emphasis on appointing good teachers rather than simply those with relevant qualifications, experience of the university system proved to be valuable for the administrative dimension to teaching. Skills such as lesson planning and general workload management were seen to be more developed in university graduates than in teachers with no qualifications whatsoever. Thus, although specific teaching qualifications such as QTS or PGCE training were not seen to reflect teaching ability in prospective teachers, there was a preference, borne of experience with teachers of varying qualifications over time, for a university background in members of teaching staff.

Origins meet objectives

In addition to the background of the school the personal background of the head and deputy head, as founders of the school, explains many elements of the current ethos at the school which will be analysed and discussed in-depth in the next chapter. The deputy head had been educated in South Africa and was of Gujarati background. Education was seen to be important in her family, and the

surrounding context of apartheid led to the relationship between education and Islam representing a dichotomy in practice. According to the deputy head:

When we went to school it was school without any Islam. OK you were Muslim, but there wasn't much provision for Islam in our school and then we went home and went to *madrassa*, and that's what parents expected or just were happy with. That didn't work with [the head] and I, that's what the difference was. So of course, that's why we want our children to be comfortable in their faith so that they can serve better in the wider community. So if they come to secondary age, if they go into the state-run college or they want to go to another Muslim school then fine. It's OK being Muslim and it's OK talking about what Islam expects of you, for them to be comfortable.

The deputy head's experiences of clearly separate educational and Islamic spheres represented the opposite of the head's vision of Islamic education in the English context. The head's view was that Islam is a way of life and so should not be packed away and left at home; the prior knowledge and experiences of the head and deputy head provided the basis for their interest in Islamic education and in its implications for their own children. The deputy head outlined the rationale for their involvement in Muslim schools:

[The head and I] wanted our own children to be comfortable. It was something I just lived with and didn't discuss it, but [the head] saw that many children weren't comfortable with their faith. They wanted their faith, but when they went out into the wider world or when they went into a setting like a school, or secondary teaching, it was almost, it had to be boxed away... and [the head] said 'well it's our way of life', and it's true.

As discussed earlier, the head's departure as governor of a nearby Muslim school illustrated the commitment to developing an Islamic educational environment which could facilitate the values outlined in the above statement. The extent to which the school was to represent an Islamic way of life in early stages was met with surprise by some overseas parents. The deputy head explained that on one

particular occasion, a parent entered the school and was greeted with *assalamu alaikum*. The following exchange then took place with the deputy head:

Parent: '*Assalamu alaikum?* It's a school!'

Deputy Head: 'Yes.'

P: 'You just said *assalamu alaikum* and *Allah*'

DH: 'Yeah but, we are Muslims.'

P: 'But it's a school! We don't say these things in an English school, this is England!'

DH: 'But you're a Muslim anywhere.'

The above illustrates the extent to which the integrated ethos pursued by the head and deputy head at Medina Primary stood in stark contrast to the preconceived ideas, even among prospective parents, of the dichotomy and thus perceived incompatibility of Islam and education in the English context at the time of the school's inception.

The objectives at Medina Primary, originally rooted in the head and deputy head's interests for their own children, were to provide an Islamic environment within which Muslim children could develop in a continuous process without compromising or having to suppress their Islamic identity. The rationale behind Medina Primary, based on the personal experiences of the deputy head during childhood, lay in the conviction that separating Islam from school life would result in children developing 'mixed ideas' and consequently losing confidence in themselves as young Muslims. For the head and deputy head, the success of

this approach to Islamic education was embodied in their children's development within Medina primary. As a result of their time there, the head and deputy head felt that their daughter and son, at A level and GCSE ages respectively, were equipped to talk comfortably about Islamic issues whilst accepting opposing arguments in debate. According to the deputy head the experience of being in a Muslim school had helped their daughter enormously through the transition from a Muslim secondary school to a state college. She concluded that the 'aim is to equip the children with a childhood that is going to help them in the wider community because we've got to be part of the community and society' (deputy head, Medina Primary).

Final reflections on the prospect of state funding for Muslim schools in the current educational climate indicate that although there was a strong sense of a specific and nurtured ethos, born of the head and deputy head's personal journeys towards their educational goals in the independent sector, an obligation remained to pursue all means of developing the school to serve children and parents. Therefore although initial experiences of Islamic education in the state sector actually provided the rationale for developing Medina Primary as an independent school, current attitudes indicated that state funding might no longer *necessarily* be incompatible with the specific ethos developed by the head and deputy head. To quote the deputy head:

[The head] was involved with [another Muslim school], it [was] such a struggle to go V/A status. But the tables have turned now and now Muslim schools are almost forced to go for state funding. When we started up [Medina Primary] it never occurred to us at the time, it was just going to be a little independent school. I left that to [the head,] and his choice was that we don't want to do that. I think that's very much the case with him still. With myself, and him now, I said we need to find out more about it because I think with parents and the, the community, it's a

community school and it's a service you're providing, a lot of parents do struggle paying the fees.

Thus at Medina Primary there was a strong overall conviction that the independent sector facilitated an approach to Islamic education which had not been possible in the state sector previously. However, a moral dilemma was raised when considering entering the voluntary-aided sector. Although the ethos of the school was fundamentally important, the required economic commitment to fees was problematic for some prospective parents. As a result the head and deputy head felt a moral obligation to balance the priorities of the school. Their stance at the time of writing was that it would be necessary to remain in the independent sector in order to facilitate the desired ethos, in which case parents would be required to pay fees.

Positioning Hiqmah School in the voluntary-aided sector

As outlined in Chapter 2, voluntary-aided schools in England and Wales are state-funded schools permitted to embody a 'religious character' and employ denominational religious education (UK Parliament 1998a). Of particular relevance for the case study of Hiqmah School is 'grant-maintained status' which was introduced under the 1993 Education Act (UK Parliament 1993). Although particularly difficult for Muslim schools to achieve at that time (Walford, 2003: 165), Hiqmah School initially secured grant-maintained status in 1998. The school operated under the system for one year before switching to voluntary-aided status following the abolition of the centrally controlled 'grant-maintained status' in the 1998 Education Act. Voluntary-aided schools with a religious

character are, at the time of writing, funded up to 90% by local authorities, with outstanding costs being covered by a relevant religious organisation (DfES 2002: [4]). Hiqmah School is currently voluntary-aided and affiliated with a local Islamic trust of the same name.

Introducing Hiqmah School: location, community and intake

Similarly to Medina Primary, Hiqmah School bordered a large Muslim community in a district located outside a city centre. The characteristics of the school's surroundings are revealed when travelling from the city centre to Hiqmah. Two prominent Muslim communities neighbour each other, the first of which is a Somali community located just prior to entering the district that the school is located in. Distinctive features include a Somali day centre, general grocery shops and small local businesses such as internet cafes and small scale supermarkets typically occupying properties in a seemingly utilitarian manner. This is an area of small, local businesses rather than of housing.

On gaining closer proximity to the school, the surroundings change dramatically to a more residential area occupied by a large South Asian community. Small local businesses are still present, although primarily in the form of small-scale supermarkets. The majority of residents visible in the streets and local facilities were Muslim women, typically dressed in traditional Islamic dress of modest colours, with approximately half wearing the *niqab*. In contrast to the community bordering Medina Primary, the community immediately neighbouring Hiqmah School is largely of Pakistani descent, with a trend for second generation British Pakistanis to marry first time migrants. Therefore the

predominantly second and third generation migrant population living around Medina Primary, themselves descended from second generation migrants from India to Uganda (Singh 2003: 42), was in contrast with the culturally regenerative aspect of Hiqmah School's surrounding community.

The school itself is located just beyond the limits of the Pakistani community described above. The immediate surroundings of Hiqmah School are characterised by social clubs, car repair industries, family cafes and public houses, all of which appear to be devoid of influence from the nearby Muslim community. However, on turning onto the road where the school is located, it is clear that the immediate setting is a mixed residential area in which White non-Muslim families constitute an approximate majority of at least three quarters. The remaining families are South Asian, the vast majority of which are represented by the presence of traditionally dressed and occasionally veiled Muslim women.

Profile of staff and intake at Hiqmah School

When interviewed the head at Hiqmah School emphasised the increased size of the school more than any other factor following the transition to voluntary-aided status. According to the head, a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim teaching staff had been employed since the school's inception. The head explained:

As far as teaching staff was concerned it was virtually 50%, or 60% Muslim, and non-Muslim, because we've always believed in appointing the best person for the job; ultimately it's the children's future that matters and they only have one go with education.

The current profile of staff continued to represent this mix of Muslim and non-Muslim teachers at the time of the research, with around half of the teaching staff being Muslims of South Asian or Arab descent. However, the head explained that among teaching assistants (TAs) a much higher proportion would be Muslims of South Asian or Arab descent.

The tendency to employ a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim staff at Hiqmah School was not seen to clash with the objective of providing an Islamic environment for children and families. The following extract from an interview with the head illustrates the approach to appointing staff at Hiqmah School:

The first and foremost purpose of the school is a high level of education and so one of the things we do go for is the best person for the job. And at the time of appointment staff who apply for a job at this school are very clear, the school has an Islamic ethos and of course there has to be a willingness to be able to support that. As long as the willingness is there then we go ahead and appoint the member of staff. We train as much as we possibly can, but they're always supported by the senior team and the TAs if they need any help... those established staff who are really committed to the ethos would use the etiquette language throughout the school day, and those who don't wish to, other than *assalamu alaikum* the rest of the etiquettes are very much a matter of choice.

The appointment of non-Muslim staff at Hiqmah School, along with the encouragement for them to use basic Islamic etiquettes demonstrated approaches to fulfilling the dual objectives of providing a high quality of educational provision whilst retaining Islamic provision. The balance between Islamic objectives and requirements for voluntary-aided status at Hiqmah will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Profile of intake over time

At the time of the research the intake at Hiqmah School represented a similar cross section of British Muslims to those represented in Medina Primary's intake, although in different proportions. Interview and observation data indicates that around half the children at the school were of South Asian descent, with the remaining intake comprising pupils of various backgrounds. To quote the head:

The rest would be a mix of a whole range of different nationalities from pupils of Caribbean descent, those from the African subcontinent such as Somalis, Egyptians and so on. And then we've got pupils from the Arab subcontinent, countries like Syria etc, and we would have some pupils who are mixed heritage, and two or three pupils that come from indigenous English backgrounds who chose Islam as a way of life.

The transition from independent to voluntary-aided saw the intake develop as financial commitments to the school were removed as necessary pre-requisites for prospective parents. As an independent school attendance was based primarily on parents' ability to afford annual fees, and so only those in this particular situation had access to Islamic education at Hiqmah School for their children. The transition from independent to grant-maintained status opened up the school to prospective parents who had not previously been able to afford fees. In keeping with the surrounding faith school community, Hiqmah School adopted the same admissions policy as local Church schools (Anglican and Catholic), prioritising children on the basis, firstly, of whether they had siblings in the school, and secondly according to the distance of the family home from the school. In practice, owing to the increased demand following the transition to grant-maintained status, the family homes of the school's current pupils were typically located within a small number of streets close to the school. The head concluded: 'By the time we have served those we're full, so that changed the

profile.’ The main impact of the transition to grant-maintained status on the intake of the school was that it became more localised, whereas when the school had been independent pupils whose parents could afford the fees would attend from all over the city.

Hiqmah School: the school building

The nature of the school building in each case initially highlighted the differing financial positions of the schools. Whereas Medina Primary utilised space economically and employed mobile units to cater for years 3-6, initial impressions on arriving at Hiqmah School indicated that the current building had always been a purpose built school. The reception area, at the front of the building, was accessed by walking around black iron gates spanning the length of the school. The Mosque, positioned at an angle within the grounds, could be seen from the front of the school and appeared to be a much newer building than the redbrick school, and to have been constructed of steel and glass. A barrier with a keypad separated the reception area from classrooms and offices of staff. In contrast to Medina Primary, all classrooms for children above nursery age were housed in one building, which not only comprised 6 year group classes, but also included three overflow groups: 1/2, 3/4, and 5/6 (to be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7). The nursery and two reception classes were housed in an annexed rear part of the school building, with a partitioned play area outside the entrance specifically for younger children. A large playground backing onto the year 4 and 5 classrooms catered for children in all the remaining classes, and was shared with the Muslim all-girls independent upper school which backed onto Hiqmah School’s grounds. During the research process at Hiqmah School it was

repeatedly affirmed that the two schools were chiefly related by proximity, and that they were entirely different schools, although some pupils from families affluent enough to pay school fees did attend the upper school after leaving Hiqmah.

Hiqmah's history: origins of the school

Hiqmah School originated as a small study group in October 1989. The intention at its inception was not that the study group would become a school. Rather, consistent with the origins of Medina Primary, the aim was simply for the head to provide education for her daughter in an Islamic environment. The motivation for developing the study group grew from the head's conviction that nothing was available in terms of bringing together both the national curriculum and Islamic education. The head had previously taken the initiative to teach her daughter at home, but, on hearing that subsequently the head was giving up her teaching job, colleagues suggested that their children might also become part of the study group.

Initially, one room was rented to cater for four to five children, with that figure growing to 10 by the end of the first year. Following this initial growth, members of the local Muslim community expressed great interest in developing the study group to cater for their own children. In order to cater for the new interest the study group moved firstly into a three-room property, before settling into a larger building in September 1992 as an established primary school with approximately 100 pupils and subsequently adopted its current name.

As Hiqmah School a recurring concern among staff was that the head would only be active in the school until her daughter's education at primary level was complete. This apprehension affected parents and the surrounding community who also shared the concern about the future of their children's school. As a school within the independent sector, financial constraints also posed questions about the feasibility of continually serving the surrounding community. According to the head 'as an independent school, because, we had to make a lot of sacrifices, so it wasn't sustainable in the long term.'

The struggle faced by Hiqmah School when in the independent sector, along with demand in the Muslim community, led governors and the head to look into alternative options for ensuring the longevity of the school. The head recalled:

We then began to look at alternatives and options that were available. And we explored the voluntary-aided option, other options that were available as well which was grant-maintained, and decided to go down the grant-maintained route to become a more sustainable school. Because, of course, sacrifices are fine but there are only so many people who, you know, not everybody could make the same sacrifices whereas if we were able to become a mainstream school we, teachers would be paid well and we'd become a more sustainable school.

Having considered the option of state funding, one constant criterion was that no major changes to the curriculum would have to be made to make the transition from the independent sector. On presenting the possible options for moving into the state sector, parents initially voted in favour of applying for grant-maintained rather than voluntary-aided status. On reviewing the application process the head and managerial staff held the conviction that Hiqmah School could become a grant-maintained school with 'virtually no change at all' (head, Hiqmah School). The transition would not affect teaching staff as all members already held the

necessary teaching qualifications to enter the state sector, and on analysis the head and managerial staff concluded that the curriculum that was being delivered already met the needs of the national curriculum, and thus Hiqmah School ‘was the same as any other school other than the ethos being slightly different’ (head, Hiqmah School.)

The head and staff decided to submit the application for a ‘one-form entry school’ (taking on a single class of approximately 30 pupils at the beginning of each academic year) with the view that being a relatively small school would make it easier to maintain the ethos that had developed whilst in the independent sector. The head stated that:

We always wanted to ensure that there was a mix of teachers, at least there were 50 per cent, around 40 to 50 per cent of the teachers were Muslim in order to be able to maintain the ethos of the school. And recruitment might become an issue if it became more than a one-form entry school.

It was felt then that being a one-form entry school would help with the sustainability of the school in terms of staff, along with having implications for retaining the character of ethos at Hiqmah.

Ethos in grant-maintained and voluntary-aided contexts

In interviews the head articulated the conviction that the ethos of the school had not changed at all following the move into the grant-maintained sector. A recurring concern, when considering the options for moving into the state sector, had been whether or not the financial benefits of making the transition would result in the need for changes or sacrifices to be made in terms of the teaching of

the children. Reflecting on this concern the head stated: ‘the reason we decided, “yes we’ll go ahead”, was that we felt that we wouldn’t have to make any changes and we could continue operating the way we were.’ The school was granted grant-maintained status in 1998, and operated as a grant-maintained school until the end of the 1998-1999 academic year. At the end of its first year as a state funded school the policy of grant-maintained funding was abolished which meant that Hiqmah School would make the transition into the voluntary-aided sector; thus falling under the jurisdiction of local education authorities, rather than directly with the DfES in central government. Moving into the voluntary-aided sector, rather than becoming a community school, meant that Hiqmah could retain its affiliation with a local Muslim trust which had promoted it over the years, and could also continue to appoint foundation governors.

Background of the curriculum at Hiqmah School

Prior to initiating the study group the head had worked as a teacher in mainstream state schools. Having this background experience gave the head insights into approaches to education which might be appropriate for her daughter. On taking the initiative to start up the study group the head’s experience led her to adopt a holistic approach with the intention that this would give a balanced education for Muslim children. The development of the school represents an ‘organic’ process as it had not been a long term aim to establish a voluntary-aided Muslim school. On reflection the head explained: ‘If somebody had said to me in 1989 that in 2002 you’d be on this site with this school I would have laughed because it wasn’t something that I had planned... it just grew in an organic way’ (head, Hiqmah School).

The head's prior experience as a teacher was of specific importance when developing what has become the curriculum for Hiqmah School. The head explained:

The curriculum, as a teacher and somebody who had been there, in positions of responsibility I had a very good idea as to how curriculum works, but the rest we had to learn because obviously setting up a school is a very different ball game to teaching in a running school. And with the curriculum the idea had always been to educate children in a well rounded way, and the ideas and thoughts that I had more or less are embedded in the aims and mission and vision statement of the school. The children need to be prepared for a world which is multicultural, multi-faith, and do well and go on to university so, but they need to be confident people in themselves and that is what the vision has always been, in a way, for me.

Thus, the head's familiarity with the education system in terms of both delivering the curriculum and perceived limitations for Muslim children in non-denominational state schools informed the development of the curriculum and approaches to its delivery at Hiqmah School (to be discussed further in Chapter 7). With educational success a core objective of the school, this background experience served as a foundation for the development of the school in general, and subsequently its ethos in turn.

Early stages of state funding

The transition into the grant-maintained sector, and later the voluntary-aided sector facilitated sustainability, and this is consistent with the narratives of School A and School B. For the head, a major positive implication was that parents who had previously not had the opportunity to attend Hiqmah School because they were unable to financially commit to fees were afforded access

following the transition. In addition to widening access for prospective parents, staff could also join the teachers' pension scheme. Other opportunities and networks also developed. The head related:

We became part of a family of schools in [the city]. In the past, we have again been very lucky because we were able to participate in some of the activities as an independent school and work together with schools. But then becoming part of the family of schools helped in the sense of opening up opportunities both for our children and for children from the local schools where we could work together on projects; and particularly schools that were of similar mind in curriculum development, we were able to do a lot of work together.

Educational provision had been central for Hiqmah School when in the independent sector, and the transition to grant-maintained/voluntary-aided status had facilitated an emphasis on development in line with national curriculum objectives. Whereas the primary emphasis at Medina was on maintaining the model of Islamic ethos facilitated within the independent sector, the primary aims at Hiqmah were to bring the form and content of the national curriculum to Muslim children in an Islamic environment. That is not to say that educational objectives were not important at Medina Primary, approaches to curriculum development and the relationship between the Islamic ethos and the curriculum will be discussed in Chapter 6. Rather the status of the school as independent facilitated the core aim of providing a particular Islamic ethos. Similarly at Hiqmah School its status as voluntary-aided, at the time of the research, facilitated the core emphasis on educational objectives. A full discussion of ethos at each school, and comparisons between the two, are provided in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

My interviews with the head revealed that the core emphasis on educational objectives at Hiqmah School had developed from a drive to bring a national standard of education to Muslim children without their sacrificing their Islamic identity. She explained that during her experience of working in education she had felt continuing anxiety concerning Muslim children who were not educated about their own identity. This concern is consistent with part of the *rationale behind Islamic schools* as discussed in Chapter 2, namely the conviction that there should be no secular/spiritual divide in Muslim practice (Hussain 2004: 322). A concern that attending a non-Muslim state school would result in Muslim children sacrificing their Islamic identities was expressed by the head at Hiqmah:

Children who do sacrifice their own identities do have problems as they grow up because they, because clarity of identity, I feel, is just so important for confidence and in order to do well in life. And to me that is just so fundamental for children to be able to understand who they are, and of course like all human beings we're all curious about where we've come from and where we're going, and we have our own ways of being able to understand those bigger questions.

The key aim for Hiqmah School then was to offer Muslim children a path to achieving educational objectives in an environment where their Islamic identity would also be developed. Central objectives for Medina Primary were to provide a particular approach to Islamic education, with the conviction that this would necessarily lead to achieving educational objectives. The distinct characteristics of each school's ethos and approaches to Islamic education are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6: An In-Depth Analysis of Ethos at Medina

Primary

Building on the background of Medina Primary as discussed in Chapter 5, this chapter will focus on analysing the qualities of the school's ethos. Throughout data analysis four main higher level concepts emerged as factors in the ethos at Medina Primary. They were: *Nurturing an Islamic environment*; *Curriculum*; *Leading by example*; and *Medina: Inside and outside the school*. Each will be discussed in turn with relevant subsections outlining the components of each concept. At its conclusion this chapter will have provided a full picture of the elements of ethos that are in continuous interaction at Medina Primary.

Nurturing an Islamic environment

The emphasis on 'Nurturing an Islamic Environment' represented the most prominent aspect of ethos at Medina Primary, and was immediately apparent on entering the school. The ways in which 'Nurturing an Islamic Environment' was manifested and experienced at Medina are discussed through the lower level concepts: *The objectives of Muslim schools*; *Values*; *Discipline*; *Independent sector and perceptions of state funding*; and *Distinctive ethos*. Each of these areas will be discussed in turn in the following subsections.

The objectives of Muslim schools

On first entering the school, the environment immediately gave the impression that particular objectives were manifested within the ethos at Medina Primary. Discussing the objectives underlying ethos at Medina specifically, and the staff's perceptions of the objectives of Muslim schools as a whole, represented a recurring theme throughout the research. In our first interview the assistant head referred to the school's mission statement to outline the specific objectives at Medina. The central objective for her was to develop the 'Islamic personality' of the child. As a central individual in curriculum development at Medina Primary, the assistant head used examples of approaches in the classroom to illustrate one of the ways that the school aimed to develop the Islamic personality of the child. She explained that a holistic approach to education was employed so that children 'understand that being a Muslim is not just a spiritual act,' but that it is a 'whole way of life so that everything you do is ultimately linked to pleasing the Lord' (see also Hussain 2004: 379). This approach is consistent with Islamic conceptions of knowledge discussed in the literature review, as the key objective in developing the Islamic personality of the child was to instil in pupils the notion that everything has a purpose in an Islamic way of life. The assistant head stated that:

Whether you're doing maths, or you're doing science, ultimately there's a purpose behind it... I taught in the state system. I've done the same thing, where you pretend to be a tree and you're growing up; we do exactly the same thing but here, the language used during that lesson was there for another reason, [for] the objective of creating that understanding that *Allah* is the creator, and things only grow by the command of *Allah*.

The *Qur'an* teacher (who also specialised in teaching Arabic) at Medina Primary supported this view that developing the Islamic personality was the central

objective of the school. He explained that one of the key focuses of faith schools, and Medina Primary specifically, was to offer ‘a focused education about manners and behaviour which should give you a method of dealing with people... whoever and wherever you meet them in the future.’ This is consistent with the assistant head’s concept of developing the Islamic personality of children through instilling in them the notion that Islam is a way of life and that everything done within that context serves a purpose.

The objectives of Muslim schools, as articulated at Medina Primary, was to develop the Islamic identity of the child through instilling in them the concept of Islam as a lived way of life (see Hussain 2004: 322). In keeping with this perspective, among teaching staff there was an emphasis on the role of the school offering provision for necessary everyday practices whilst providing a ‘safe environment’ (year 3 teacher), and a ‘whole school environment’ that was ‘quite nice’ (year 6 teacher). In line with discussions of the Islamic worldview in Chapter 2 (see Dangor 2005, Halstead 2004, Hussain 2004), the approach at Medina Primary was to reaffirm that there should be no secular/spiritual divide within Muslim practice. Thus all actions had a sense of purpose which had implications for the general environment of the school. The conviction that the Islamic context was constant and that all actions serve a purpose within that context could clearly be seen to provide a strong base from which to nurture an Islamic environment.

Values

Instilling appropriate values was a key factor in developing the Islamic identity of the child at Medina Primary, and thus played a key part in nurturing an Islamic environment at the school. The *Qur'an* teacher explained that values were promoted with a particular focus on manners. He also stated that, although inherently bound to an Islamic environment in their own particular context, values promoted were 'fairly universal'. In discussing values promoted at Medina Primary in relation to wider issues, he explained that those of importance included:

Manners, self-control, being tolerant, really stuff that, in a general sense every school tries to portray. I mean these are universal behaviour management techniques, and we call them values as well because if you realise that your behaviour has consequences in the wider society then you become more reflective, and hopefully more measured in your impulses and so on. I suppose that is what we're doing, but putting it in an Islamic context, or seeing that as something which ultimately isn't just a social benefit, [but] has a spiritual benefit as well.

There was also a general consensus among teaching staff that the 'spiritual benefit' of values promoted at the school, including manners, self control, tolerance and openness with one another, went beyond the individual and represented an inherent characteristic of the Islamic environment of the school.

In a statement typical of the above consensus, a year 1 teacher stated:

With the children, we instil in them the values, so I realise that now their behaviour, they realise what it depends on. So basically, it's all to do with their faith. I feel the environment is, because of their faith, much more positive... In general I think things like respect, even behaviour like how to respect your elders, how to respect teachers, how to respect the head teacher. And we [help] them learn how to be good Muslims outside of the school as well.

The overall attitude to values at Medina Primary was that those promoted in the school were universal values which all schools probably aimed to instil in their

pupils. The distinction comes from considering the driving force behind promoting such values. Although directed at the individual child in the immediate sense, the drive to promote values with an Islamic ‘spiritual benefit’ at Medina invariably acted as a mechanism to nurture an Islamic environment. Although these values may well have universal relevance for the educational context in general, promoting values with the objective of offering both a social and a spiritual benefit, through approaching Islam as a lived way of life, clearly represented the driving force behind prioritising the development of values in the individual child at Medina Primary (see Halstead 2004, Hanson 2001).

Discipline

Approaches to discipline at Medina Primary also played an important role in the Islamic environment of the school. The *Qur’an* teacher held the conviction that although approaches to discipline were consistent with Islamic values promoted in the school, they were not distinctive of Medina Primary as a Muslim school. Reflecting on his experiences during teacher training at a non-Muslim school, he recalled that there had been more discipline problems in particular ways. The approach to discipline at the aforementioned non-Muslim school was to:

...use praise and reward and constantly remind children who have fallen below expectations of the consequences for their actions rather than just blanket reprimanding. There’s nothing modern about it at all it’s exactly what Imam Ghazali, a foremost Islamic thinker, [was] telling educators to do in the 12th century.

The above demonstrates the same concept of universality described in relation to values. Again, although approaches to discipline might be universally applicable, the point of reference was the key factor in explaining *why* these

approaches were applied in each context. The *Qur'an* teacher referred to a social and a spiritual benefit when discussing the values promoted at Medina Primary, and demonstrated a similar conviction in relation to approaches to discipline. Whereas approaches to discipline and the values promoted at Medina Primary may well have been common to values within the educational context in general, it was the commitment to the spiritual benefit as well as the social benefit which was significant for nurturing an Islamic environment. The spiritual benefit offers the reason for values and approaches to discipline at Medina: Islam as a lived way of life. These universal values and approaches to discipline would invariably be employed on the basis of a social benefit rather than a spiritual one in non-faith educational contexts.

In terms of specific approaches to discipline, interviews with the head illustrated that its status as an independent Muslim school facilitated a particular approach to discipline:

We would put up with far less in terms of negative behaviour from a child before we'd ask them to leave than in the state system. We can set our own tolerance levels if you like... And all of that contributes towards the ethos. You can be what a child thinks is strict in the sense that you've got order in the place and the kids are doing what you want them to do; at the same time making it fun for them to do it. So it's getting that balance right, I think that contributes towards the ethos.

Within the classroom, the general feel at Medina Primary was that children were observant of teachers' efforts to maintain order. The overall environment of the classroom seemed to communicate the importance of good behaviour to children, often with Islamic references. For example, within the year 1 classroom there was a 'Golden Rules' display comprising seven signs, each representing a rule:

1. Always remember *Allah*;

2. Be gentle and kind;
3. Look after our materials and books;
4. Always tell the truth;
5. Walk in the classroom;
6. Be neat and tidy and
7. Share.

The 'Golden Rules' display embodied rules which both directly and indirectly contain Islamic references, and this may have had some influence on maintaining order within the classroom. For example, in the nursery foundation 1 class during play based learning, two boys were playing with a wooden train set. Following some mild disagreement between the two, a teaching assistant said to one boy 'we must share, who is watching?' the boy replied '*Allah*.' The teaching assistant confirmed 'that's right, *Allah* is watching so we must share.'

Lessons necessarily require teacher-pupil communication, and children contributed to lessons in many and varied ways. 'Carpet time' typically took place at the beginning of lessons, where teachers would explain a task to children. During carpet time, children were often asked to contribute by answering questions, and classes were generally quiet. Children were also asked to contribute at the end of tasks completed at their desks, and volunteers would explain their work at the front of the class. However, during tasks, particularly practical ones (see the example of circuit making below) and when tidying up, noise levels tended to rise. In terms of maintaining order in the classroom throughout the school, several approaches were used by teachers, usually in response to noise levels rising. For example, the year 3 classroom had a

‘loudness scale’ mounted on the dry-wipe board. Points 0 – ‘silence’, 1 – ‘quiet work’ and 2 – ‘group conversation’ were deemed as acceptable levels of noise during a lesson in various circumstances. If the teacher felt that sound had risen to point 3 – ‘too loud’ or 4 – ‘very loud’ then she would blow a whistle to gain the attention of the class.

This approach was also observed in the year 4 classroom and over the lessons observed a whistle was used no more than four times during a lesson. In addition, within year 4 lessons, on two occasions the teacher rapped a wooden meter stick against the dry-wipe board in response to loud noise levels. It is worth noting that children were making circuits with batteries in a practical design and technology lesson, and the task seemed to create excitement. Particularly in year 1 and year 2, teachers typically raised their right hand to gain quiet in classes, with children responding quickly by going quiet and raising their own right hand. This approach was also used by the head and assistant head in assemblies, accompanied by a count down from ‘five’ to ‘one’, with silence being achieved almost instantly. Counting down from ‘five’ to ‘one’ was also effective during observation sessions with year 3 and year 4 classes. In addition, house points were also given out in assemblies and during lessons to reward good behaviour and effort shown by children.

In addition to maintaining order in the classroom, approaches to dealing with more serious discipline related issues were also strengthened through Medina Primary’s status as an independent Muslim school. When asked about bullying the head expressed the conviction that it would not be tolerated:

...we have children move here from state schools, twins one year, and they were walking round the first week with their fists clenched waiting for the bullying to start. And we had to tell them 'Chill', you know? It doesn't happen here. If it does happen we're down on it like a ton of bricks. We had another boy who was bigger than average, taller and broader, and again looking for the fights, but it didn't arrive. I think that is an important aspect of why the [independent] schools tend to achieve more.

Drawing on the notion of social and spiritual benefit, approaches to discipline at Medina, facilitated by the school's independent status, constituted an important aspect of nurturing an Islamic environment.

Independent sector and perceptions of state funding

There was a general consensus throughout both management and teaching staff that the school's status as independent influenced the ethos of the school. When I first encountered this view I interpreted it as being a stance against state funding. However, as the data collection period continued, it became clear that there was a small degree of ambivalence about state funding for Medina Primary. There was certainly no strong criticism of the concept of state funded Muslim schools in general. Any concerns about voluntary-aided status were specifically in relation to the requirements for Medina Primary, and the conviction that their *distinctive* ethos might not flourish in the state sector because of associated regulations and requirements. As discussed in Chapter 2, a recurring theme in theories of institutional isomorphism is that institutional rules function as myths depicting various formal structures (e.g. the voluntary-aided Muslim school) as rational means to the attainment of desirable ends (Meyer & Rowan 1977: 345) in the absence of evidence that they increase organisational efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 153). Concerns at Medina that their *distinctive* ethos may not

be able to flourish in the voluntary-aided sector shows awareness among managerial staff that processes necessary for acquiring voluntary-aided status could compromise their objectives. There is certainly a common thread linking DiMaggio and Powell's critical stance that isomorphic processes proceed in the absence of evidence that they increase organisational efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 153), and the reservations held among managerial staff concerning state funding for Medina Primary. The approach to nurturing an Islamic environment at Medina implied that a model of good practice for Islamic education would be pursued within the independent sector. However there was, at the same time, open-mindedness to the prospect of how regulations for state funding may have changed over time (see discussion with the deputy head in Chapter 5 pages 165-166).

There was a consensus among staff that the independent sector had afforded liberties in terms of ways of nurturing an Islamic environment at Medina Primary. The *Qur'an* teacher mentioned the freedom afforded with the curriculum:

I don't really know the set up with the voluntary-aided schools but from what I understand there's a certain amount of curriculum content you have to teach. You can put stuff on top of that, but then you're not going to have primary school children at school from half 8 until half 5, it would make the day too long. So there's probably a limited amount that you can put in addition to the national curriculum whereas in an independent school we can modify, I mean we don't do that much DT [design and technology], we don't do as much music here. You know there's less in the curriculum of the national curriculum because we've got more of... *Qur'an*, our prayers, our Islamic studies, things that take up hours or minutes in the day.

The assistant head, who held the majority of responsibility for formal curriculum development, expressed similar views explaining that flexibility would be lost at the school's transition to voluntary-aided status:

Something I'm very passionate about is to try and change the curriculum, and not follow the national curriculum as it is, and I think that definitely would be lost. That flexibility of the curriculum which is the main aspect, the majority of the time you're teaching. I don't think it's enough just to have the add-on of having the Islamic language or having Islamic clothing in the classroom. The concepts of Islam need to be taught throughout the day, not just through some words that you use to praise children, or the dress code, or just having *salah* [prayers]. And that definitely would be lost because there would be a lot of bureaucracy coming in with the state funding.

The assistant head argued further that Medina Primary had the potential to grow financially without the need for state funding, and to move to join the intermediate level of independent schools in the wider context. It could be argued that the head and assistant head held aspirations for Medina to become isomorphic with long-established independent schools. However, at the time of the research, unlike the voluntary-aided schools in this thesis, Medina had not taken a trajectory towards becoming an intermediate level independent school, and so there is no related history of isomorphism. Nevertheless, in contrast to School A and School B (see Chapter 4), Medina Primary *is* an example of a Muslim school which has chosen to sustain itself in the independent sector for an extended period of time without pursuing voluntary-aided status.

Towards the end of the data collection process a broader take on state funding for Muslim schools had become more apparent. The deputy head, and later the head, explained that it was not constructive to hold immovable views in opposition to state funding, because if that indeed was potentially in the best interests of the

school and ultimately of the pupils, then there would be a moral obligation to pursue it. The important element here is that the Islamic environment of the school, the approach to Islam as a lived way of life (see Hussain 2004), ultimately presented a challenge to previously held beliefs about state funding through the consideration of the moral obligation to Muslim children and families. Ultimately state funding remained a consideration, and recurring themes throughout the research process at Medina Primary were centred on the appropriateness or otherwise of the independent sector for nurturing the desired Islamic environment.

Distinctive ethos

There was a consensus among both managerial and teaching staff that the ethos at Medina Primary was distinctively Islamic. Concerning whether the ethos itself was peculiar to the school, the head explained that a level of consensus had begun to develop between Muslim schools in the English context. Concepts such as distinguishing between the Islamic and the secular sphere (see Dangor 2005, Hafez 2003, Halstead 2004, Hanson 2001, Hussain 2004) or teaching with a purely educational objective simply (to quote his words) ‘go out of the window’ (head). As he went on to clarify:

The idea is that we teach everything within an Islamic framework, and that encompasses formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum. So the whole school should reflect the fact that we’re Muslims. It’s important that the staff, when we greet each other, that the kids can see how we are, [and] when we’re dealing with the parents, that they can see that this is Islam in action, recognise it as something distinctly to do with their faith. That’s the intention, that at the end of the day the child will start to understand that Islam is more than what we look like, what we wear, we’ve got a cap on, a scarf, a beard, it’s something they should be living.

Approaches to nurturing an Islamic environment were reflected in the displays present within the school, contributing to the overall feel of the environment of the school as an Islamic educational institution. For example, there were signs and displays in Arabic throughout the school alongside educational displays in classrooms which teachers would refer to during lessons. The communal office had a framed painting of a Mosque mounted, the title of which was written in the Arabic *abjad* (Arabic alphabet). Staff later confirmed that the picture was of *Al-Masjid al-Nabawi* (Mosque of the Prophet). Within the *Masjid* there was a large cloth print with an image of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque hanging on the back wall, with a mosaic the children had made, again depicting *Al-Masjid al-Nabawi*, on the opposite wall. These displays had titles or descriptions on signs to accompany them in either the Arabic *abjad*, or phonetic Arabic using the Latin/English alphabet with accompanying descriptions in English.

The head continued to illustrate the ways in which he felt that the school had a distinct ethos arising from the Islamic environment of the school.

This is our tenth year of operation now. We've developed, if you like, a niche in the sense of the emphasis that we place on the *Qur'an*. Every day starts with the *Qur'an*, it always has done and it's something that we continue, so much so now that we've got a member of staff full-time, whose job is to teach *Qur'an* and to teach Arabic linked to the *Qur'an*. Not as a language as such, we find that generally that fails because the kids aren't practising it at home. The interaction they have with Arabic language every day is the *Qur'an*. So if we can teach them the basics of Arabic, to be able to understand *Qur'an* then that's gonna have more success rather than being able to go to Egypt and have a conversation with a taxi driver, which you could probably still do!

The integrated approach to teaching Arabic through the *Qur'an* had resulted in the school developing a reputation. Some parents held the view that the school ethos was 'more Islamic than other [Muslim] schools' (head). Some had moved

from London and the South East so that their children could attend the school. Parents who had moved felt that the ethos at Medina Primary was of importance for the development of their children's Islamic identity. Whilst parents were aware that ethos at Medina might be consistent with that at other Muslim schools, the perception among parents who had moved to attend the school was that the ethos at Medina was not only distinctly Islamic, but also distinctive of the school.

Curriculum

The curriculum itself at Medina Primary was a key contributor to the school's ethos and seemed to be the central unifying factor across the higher-level concepts. The subsections *Qur'an and Arabic*, *Islamic studies*, *Islamicised curriculum* and *Performance* will demonstrate the role that the curriculum played in ethos at Medina Primary.

Qur'an and Arabic

By contrast with Berglund's account of the integrated IRE (Islamic Religious Education) in three Swedish Muslim schools discussed in Chapter 2 (see Berglund 2009: 25-26, 61), the explicit delivery of Islamic content at Medina Primary was largely broken down into three subjects: *Qur'an*, Islamic studies and separate Arabic lessons. A key part of the school day at the school was the morning sessions of *Qur'an*. Key stage 2 (years 4, 5 and 6) would have a collective lesson in the prayer room (*Masjid*) between 8:50 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Just

before the end of the key stage 2 *Qur'an* lesson key stage 1 (all children from foundation 2 up to year 3) would filter into the *Masjid* prayer room for a whole school assembly. Once assembly was over, the key stage 2 group would leave the *Masjid* and key stage 1 would have their *Qur'an* lesson. Verses from the *Qur'an* would be written on the dry wipe board by the *Qur'an* teacher (referred to by the children as 'ustad' meaning teacher or master) using the Arabic *abjad*. The children would then collectively recite the passage aloud in Arabic whilst following the teacher's guidance across the dry-wipe board one line at a time. The teacher would then stop the recitation and explain the meaning behind each particular line of passage. Children were then asked to volunteer and explain what they understood each line of the recitation to mean in English. The *Qur'an*, as the word of God delivered through the Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w.), is intended to be read aloud as it was received in Arabic. The children were therefore encouraged to recite in a particular tone (or *tajwid* as referred to by Nasira in Chapter 4) which was musical to the ear and had a clear repetitive phrasing. Within this approach children are learning how to read the Arabic *abjad*, how to recite using the *tajwid* and the meaning behind recitations.

This approach to and understanding of the origins of the *Qur'an* informed instinctive general behaviour at times. For example, on one morning the *Qur'an* teacher had written a passage in Arabic on the board and was explaining the meaning of a particular line. Then impulsively the *Qur'an* teacher explained to the children that he was going to check the meaning of the line because he did not want to paraphrase the word of God incorrectly. He then walked over to an area near the door of the *Masjid* where I was sitting, opened a copy of the *Qur'an*

and proceeded to recite aloud as he read the passage back to himself before returning to the class to continue the explanation. Such impulsive behaviour, although natural in an Islamic environment, stood out to me as a non-Muslim as an indicator that the teacher was morally and spiritually bound to teaching the *Qur'an* in a specific way; other subjects would not provoke the same kind of habitual behaviour. The *Qur'an* teacher reflected on these lessons each morning by stating:

We do *Qur'an*, every morning. I mean to start the day with *Qur'an*, for us that's a big blessing because we're reading *Qur'an*, we're reading the word of *Allah* first thing in the morning. Certainly for [the head] and the deputy head's [the head's wife] point of view, that's a big blessing for the school, and ...as a practice, generally good for us all to start with that.

The primary objective of the morning lessons was to teach the *Qur'an* and demonstrate to children how to recite appropriately. A significant secondary function however was that children learned Arabic through learning *how* to recite appropriately. Although there were explicit supplementary Arabic classes at Medina Primary, Arabic was primarily taught through the *Qur'an* lessons. Teaching Arabic and *Qur'an* in this integrated way originated from approaches employed by a visiting sheik (also described by the *Qur'an* teacher as a scholar of the *sacred sciences*) who previously taught *Qur'an* at the school. Reflecting on this technique the current *Qur'an* teacher explained that the sheik would teach Arabic through teaching verses in the *Qur'an*, translating them, discussing the Islamic content and meaning whilst also discussing grammar and vocabulary. This was done as an integrated process, and the current *Qur'an* teacher had adopted and continued the technique.

The emphasis on meaning behind recitation was consistent with Berglund's account of the IRE delivered at al-Furat. Whereas the other two schools in her study placed an emphasis on the form of traditions, particularly in relation to teaching the *Qur'an*, comparatively more time was taken at al-Furat to ensure children understood the meaning behind recitation (Berglund 2009: 198). In addition to the *Qur'an* at Medina Primary, separate Arabic lessons were also given periodically and were taught by the *Qur'an* teacher in year group classrooms. These lessons did not explicitly draw on the *Qur'an*, but had a more general theme such as the naming of fruits, or months of the year in Arabic and English. These periodic lessons, in addition to the daily 40-minute *Qur'an* lessons for all pupils above foundation 1, demonstrated that a large proportion of Medina Primary's curriculum was dedicated to teaching *Qur'an* and Arabic.

Islamic studies

In addition to *Qur'an* and Arabic lessons there were also dedicated Islamic studies lessons in the curriculum at Medina. The content of the curriculum for Islamic studies was primarily developed by the assistant head. However, teachers would also contribute to the content when delivering the subject in the classroom. According to the assistant head Islamic studies lessons at Medina Primary were equivalent to RE lessons and so they did contain a comparative dimension concerning other faiths, although the primary objective was to teach children about Islam and how to practise it. It is worth noting that in *Qur'an* lessons and assemblies in the morning, references to other faiths around festival times such as Christmas were made. In addition, references to other faiths in passages in the *Qur'an* then provided the basis for instruction in some of the

morning lessons. Although specific lessons concerning other faiths were not part of the curriculum, Judaism and Christianity were often referred to in Islamic studies lessons. These references would include explaining consistencies between the faiths and also historical connections between them.

An hour and thirty minutes of Islamic studies was integrated throughout weekly class timetables. The year 1 teacher at the school explained that as children left the nursery they were still accustomed to play-based learning, and so the assistant head had advised initiating a slow transition during the autumn term, incorporating national curriculum objectives into play-based learning. Meeting Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) national curriculum requirements was a key theme in the curriculum at Medina Primary, and the assistant head, along with other staff members, had developed content to meet those requirements through an almost entirely Islamicised curriculum (to be discussed in detail in the next subsection). The year 1 teacher summarised what the content of Islamic studies in her class would involve:

We have objectives to follow and when they're this young it's just the basics, the main pillars of Islam. So during the month of Ramadan we learn about that, when it's *hajj* time we learn about that, we teach them how to wash before we pray and we make them learn how to perform the *salah*... it's very simple at this level.

The inclusion of an Islamic studies curriculum, in addition to *Qur'an* and Arabic, further demonstrates the role that curriculum played in creating an Islamic ethos at Medina Primary. Although *Qur'an*, Arabic and Islamic studies demonstrate the explicit ways in which curriculum focused on Islamic provision, most of the remaining curriculum also included some Islamic content.

Islamicised curriculum

The Islamicisation of the curriculum as a whole was an important facet of ethos at Medina. The feeling communicated by staff, and through experiences conducting observation in classes, was that the curriculum was itself derived from Islamic obligation. The assistant head explained that:

If you look at a lot of Islamic rulings, look at *hadith* books, the first couple of sections are all about seeking knowledge and how it's an obligation. And seeking knowledge is not just religious knowledge because, in Islam everything is Islamic.

The assistant head went on to point out that meeting national curriculum requirements was important for children at Medina Primary because their educational experience would culminate in GCSE examinations. This was achieved through careful consideration of how content could be taught 'Islamically'. She went on to argue that Islamic education needed to go beyond dress codes and language, and that children 'need to learn throughout their day, through the curriculum, the concepts of Islam'.

In practice this approach to the curriculum had a significant influence on not only lesson content, but also delivery in the classroom. For example, the *Qur'an* teacher, discussing his approaches to teaching art, assured me that the content had focused on Islamic art, calligraphy and the architecture of Mosques around the world. Consistently with the above the year 3 teacher informed me:

In every subject you try your best to bring something in. I was doing light and shadow in science, and then there's an *ayat* in the *Qur'an* saying if *Allah* wanted to he would have kept the shadows still, but it's a sign of God, the fact that the shadows move. And so you're reminding them, even if it's just something very simple like that. And just getting them to think about how amazing is the creation of *Allah*! How big, how magnificent, everything's, this perfect clock and all the planets going round the Sun, isn't it amazing? So you're constantly bringing it back.

She continued by giving an example of how a geography lesson concerning weather would be approached. Discussions about rain would be brought back to an Islamic point of reference simply through referring to it as the work of *Allah*. Similarly, teaching about floods afforded the year 3 teacher the opportunity to review the story of Nuh (known as Noah in the Christian context) and the great flood. Questions would then be raised as to why floods happen, and whether they represent a test from God, the aim being that children would have learned simultaneously about natural events and their faith. The above approach to Islamicising the curriculum is similar to Berglund's account that in all three schools in her study IRE featured the teaching of Islamic history through the telling of religious narratives (Berglund 2009: 199). Furthermore, in the case of 'al-Furat', content from the *Qur'an* was also used to support theories of modern science (Berglund 2009: 199). It was also typical of class teachers at Medina Primary in general to use Islamic names in exercises in addition to the non-Islamic names which more typically featured in existing resources.

The year 6 teacher illustrated the ways in which the entire curriculum was delivered within an Islamic framework stating:

Islam is obviously a total way of life so we try to make them see that Islam is not just a religion that you practise... For example, when I'm teaching something like probability, in Islam that is something that we don't believe in. So if I'm teaching that in a maths lesson I'll go into the Islamic teachings which apply to it and we can understand it. However we don't shy away from teaching them, it's more like a learning platform for them because then they know what it is that they have to understand in the society and what it is you have got to understand as a Muslim and how they are going to relate and be able to deal with it.

The above demonstrates not only the approach to Islamicising the curriculum, but also the underlying objectives. Through this approach the staff were exercising their obligations as Muslims. The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for Muslims and so their pupils were encouraged to learn as part of the development of their own Islamic identity. Following from this, the process of learning was consistently informed with references to the *Qur'an* and so staff not only Islamicised their educational resources in terms of their own sense of purpose, but also Islamicised materials through the use of Muslim names in classroom exercises. The implications and objectives of the above are that:

- a) the mechanism for Islamicisation allows for any topic to be approached and taught because Islam is a lived way of life;
- b) the concept of the obligatory pursuit of knowledge for Muslims informs the meeting of national curriculum requirements;
- c) children not only develop their own Islamic identity, but in doing so within the educational context become skilled to function in wider society; thus
- d) Islamicisation offers both a spiritual and social benefit.

Almost all available wall space was used for either Islamic-based or education-based displays within classrooms at Medina. There were displays in classrooms with subject matter, such as 'fruits' accompanied by descriptions in English down one side and Arabic down the other. In many instances the Arabic descriptions used the Arabic *abjad* rather than phonetic Arabic using the English Latin-based alphabet. For example, the year 2 classroom had a 'months of the year' display, where each month was represented by two signs, one in English

and one in the Arabic *abjad*. Phonetic Arabic (written using the English Latin-based alphabet) was also used on signs and displays throughout the school. The year 1 class room had a display of the Arabic alphabet across one wall, where each character was represented in the Arabic *abjad*, and then in phonetic Arabic alongside. In addition, the year 1 classroom also had a ‘months of the year’ display with names of months in English and phonetic Arabic. In line with the Islamicised curriculum, displays in classrooms across the school also included a ‘multiplication display’ in year 4, a ‘numbers’ display in year 3, an ‘adding “ing”, “ed” and “s” to words’ display in year 2, a ‘light sources’ display in year 1 and a ‘different colours’ display in foundation 1. The educationally themed displays and those with an Islamic emphasis seemed to be present in equal proportions alongside each other throughout the school. The nature of displays at Medina reflects the overall approach to Islamicising the curriculum.

The only potential point of conflict with the national curriculum was music. At the time of the research a trip had been arranged for children from several schools to attend an event where a *nashid* artist (Muslim vocal artist) would be performing. The children from Medina Primary were also to perform, singing two songs with specifically Islamic content, and also singing ‘Blowing in the wind’ by Bob Dylan with children from another school. The *nashid* artist was to sing, but also play the guitar at the event. Owing to the sensitivity surrounding the use of musical instruments in relation to Islam, a letter was sent home to parents asking them to indicate if they opposed their child attending. The head explained that there were differing opinions among Muslims, but clearly expressed his own convictions:

I take the view that there is a prohibition of musical instruments, and even if there isn't a clear prohibition there is sufficient doubt for us to leave it alone. And there's a very simple saying of the Prophet peace be on him, 'Leave that which makes you doubt, for that which does not make you doubt,' which to me is great guidance on just about everything. We're expecting a few parents [to object] with this trip. I feel if they're trying to get a flavour of what a Muslim school might be doing then I think it's important that we go and have kids just singing without any instruments. [The *nashid* artist] will be there, and if we don't go he'll be the only [Islamic] thing there so the [other school's] kids will look and say 'Oh, he's a Muslim he's using a guitar, it must be alright'.

Clearly the head felt an obligation to contribute to the perception of Islam among children from other schools on the trip. Demonstrating this conviction and having children from Medina Primary set an example through singing without musical accompaniment can be seen to embody an element of the school's ethos in action. In this instance specific characteristics of the Islamicised curriculum at Medina can be seen to have extended and existed beyond the confines of the school building.

Performance

Consistently with trends in both independent and faith schools Medina had a good reputation in terms of performance in SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) examinations. According to the head this was derived from the Islamic ethos of the school. He elaborated that although secondary schools wanted good key stage 2 results from children at Medina Primary: 'That's not what drives us. We believe, again with varying degrees of success, that with a good Islamic education that will follow' (see Dangor 2005, Halstead 2004). The head went on to discuss the performance of the school as follows:

[School performance can be affected] in a couple of ways. One is that parents who generally choose a Muslim school have an interest in their

kid's education, and especially [in the case of] independent schools, they are making a financial investment over and above their taxes. So it's in their interests that the child does well. They keep us on our toes, and they keep their kids on their toes, because they make sure that homework is done and so forth.

The above further demonstrates that, for the head at Medina Primary, the Islamicisation of the curriculum was a means of offering a good Islamic education and was of pivotal significance for the school's performance. In addition, the commitment of parents in providing for the continuity of school requirements in the home was also seen as an important explanatory factor.

Leading by example

Leading by example represented the way in which the Islamic environment (including teachers' contributions to Islamicising the curriculum within the classroom) was continuously reaffirmed for children and staff. Factors which explain this process include: Having an *All-Muslim staff*, the *Profile of the staff*, *Language* and *Practices*.

All Muslim staff

Central to the process of leading by example was the conscious initiative of employing an all-Muslim staff at Medina Primary. The principle behind this was the conviction that children would be exposed to Muslim role models in a continuous process. The head argued that part of the reason for establishing a Muslim school was to have role models among the staff. He admitted:

I couldn't imagine employing non-Muslims here, with best will in the world and with no disrespect to anybody, but they have to be an example. So when it comes to prayer time and general *adab*, behaviour, we've got to practise our faith. That to me is the crucial issue.

Medina Primary's position in the independent sector made this policy feasible, but financial constraints also had a knock on effect for stability. In relation to stability among staff the head explained:

That's one of the things you would get in the state sector cos you've got decent salaries, then you're likely to have more stability. We look at it the other way and say what we lack in stability we get in commitment, because people are committed to work here, they come in at a lower salary.

Despite its financial restrictions, the independent sector also allowed for staff members without Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to be employed. Throughout the research process there was a consensus among management staff that QTS was not the sole defining mark of a good teacher (at the time of the research all nine teachers of children in years 1-6 were university graduates, with five holding Qualified Teacher Status). Employing teachers without QTS also had implications for commitment, as the head gave the following example:

Most of our staff are either qualified or are in the process of getting qualification. But we have employed people who would stand no chance of getting qualification because they didn't have a degree. Excellent teachers, but there would be no way with state funding we could employ them, we could keep them as teaching assistants. One was a teaching assistant to a qualified teacher, and she carried the class. So when the qualified teacher left, we offered it to the t/a and she jumped at it, she grabbed it with both hands and really developed herself professionally.

Holding a particular level of autonomy over employing staff has obvious implications for the role models with whom children will be in contact in their everyday lives.

Profile of the staff

As discussed in Chapter 5, the profile of staff at Medina Primary was varied representing South Asian Gujarati and Punjabi/Pakistani, Ugandan Gujarati, African and White British communities. Aside from ethnicity and nationality, other characteristics among the staff and trends in the surrounding community contributed to the ethos of the school. Specifically, the trend for a high turnover of female staff at the school impacted on the profile of staff at Medina Primary. Although this trend presented short term problems with securing staff over extended periods of time, there were also instances where previously employed teachers had returned. The assistant head, for example, one of the central figures in everyday running of the school and development of the curriculum, had previously left before returning to the school, as had the year 4 teacher. Their years of absence and the school management's acceptance of this demonstrated the importance placed on marriage and children, particularly for women, in the wider Muslim community. Although in this instance it resulted in a high turnover of staff, the subsection *Continuity between the home and the school* will demonstrate in a wider sense the ways in which values outside the school influenced Medina's ethos. In this instance it is argued that the emphasis on marriage and children in the wider Muslim community contributed to the ethos at Medina as the staff's lived experiences as Muslims coalesced in a shared sense of priorities.

Language

The use of Arabic language between staff members and also between staff and children played an important role in leading pupils by example. This primarily

took the form of staff leading children by example through impulsive behaviour. For example, Arabic was used abundantly in everyday communication with phrases such as *insh'Allah*, *al-hamdu lil-lah*, *masha'Allah* being used frequently. The use of Arabic phrases could be seen to reaffirm the Islamic context for children. The year 3 teacher held the conviction that this process was an integral part of children's identity development stating:

They do other things like the *Qur'an* lesson that you wouldn't get in the state school, the teaching and the language like *insh'Allah*, *al-hamdu lil-lah* (praise be to God), it's like the language is there and that's a constant reminder and you wouldn't get that with a non-Muslim teacher.

The constant process described above reaffirms to children that they are in an Islamic environment, contributing to the development of their Islamic identity and their practice of Islam. Arabic was also used in communication in many and varied contexts within the school, and represented a key facet of ethos at Medina. For example, the *Qur'an* teacher would often play 'ustad says' (a variation on 'Simon says') in Arabic with the children before Arabic or *Qur'an* lessons. Registers were called with teachers addressing children '*assalamu allaikum* [child's name] and children replying '*walaikum salam*' and on my arrival to classrooms children would often sing *salam* greetings. At the end of the school day children would be encouraged to make a recitation from the *Qur'an* when lined up in their classrooms. At the end of whole school assemblies the head would on occasion ask the school for a big '*Allahu akbar!*' to which the children would enthusiastically oblige. It is also worth noting that the four 'house names' under which children collected house points were represented by the Arabic names: *Farooqi* (blue), *Alawi* (yellow), *Siddiqui* (green) and *Uthmani* (red).

Through the use of Arabic in communication staff were exercising commonalities, between themselves and with children, inherently derived of their own experiences living 'Islam as a way of life' (Hussain 2004: 322). In addition to the general use of Arabic in interaction, teachers were also addressed in Arabic by children and each other as either *ablah* for female teachers or *ustad* for male teachers. This repeated behaviour reaffirmed to children that they were in an Islamic environment, contributing to the development of their Islamic identity and their eventual practice of Islam as a lived way of life.

Practices

There was a consensus among staff that the facilitating of necessary practices for Muslims was important for them as individuals and the school as a whole. The year 3 teacher drew on her own experiences of working in a non-Muslim state school to demonstrate personal benefits which she attributed to working in Muslim school. She had experienced alienation when working in a non-Muslim state school immediately following the attacks in New York on September 11th 2001. Maintaining an open mind, she explained the reasons why working in a Muslim school was important for her:

I didn't have a good experience but there are good schools and there are plenty of Muslims who work in good state schools and have a really good time... For non-Muslim children to be taught by an Islamic teacher, I think it really builds up community relations. But I didn't have a very positive experience. There were one or two Asian children in the school but no-one wearing the headscarf, no-one practising, and also September the 11th just happened at the time I was working there and I got a very negative reaction from not only pupils but staff. So I decided to come out of the state sector and work in an Islamic environment that really supported me practising. And also the problems with the prayer time, I had a real issue with that and, if me wearing the headscarf was causing a fuss imagine if I asked someone to come to take my lesson for 5 minutes!

The school day at Medina Primary was broken up to incorporate at least one daily prayer at lunchtime, with a change to 'British Summer Time' leading to an earlier lunchtime prayer, and a prayer at the end of the school day towards the end of my period of data collection. The *Qur'an* teacher explained how the structure of the school day incorporated the practice of prayer:

The midday prayer being the one we do throughout the year... We're doing it at the equivalent of nearly 2 o'clock now whereas last week we were doing it at half one. We do that throughout the year, and we try and fit that into lunch period. And it means basically that children have less time running round the playground because otherwise the day has to be lengthened too long because 20 minutes is taken up in prayer. We also shorten the afternoon curriculum in mid-November because then we have to pray the afternoon prayer as well sometimes because it gets very close to sunset, so that's another 15 minutes off the end of the school day.

The incorporation of prayers into the school was the primary way in which practices, such as requirements to pray, were made possible at Medina Primary. The implication for staff was that they could carry out necessary obligations within the working environment, but there were also important implications for the pupils. As they witnessed staff fulfilling their obligations children were led by example whilst simultaneously learning the act of prayer through taking part.

In addition to being led by example, the youngest pupils were explicitly taught how to pray through emulating the behaviour of adults. The head described the process:

Year 1 and 2 will come in sometime in the afternoon, and do their own prayer. One of the boys will be Imam and the teachers will be around watching them ...normally, on the midday prayer the recitation is silent. The same with the mid-afternoon prayer, but we tell them to recite out loud so that a) we can hear them reciting and b) that the kids can recite and it's not so tempting for them to mess around. So that's how we teach them, through actually letting them do it.

The process above illustrates ways in which children are led by example both passively and actively. Passive leading is informed by an all-Muslim staff acting as positive role models coming together and exercising their common experiences as Muslims. In doing so they passively led by example. In addition to the above, children are also led by example actively in being encouraged early on to emulate adults through leading their own prayers. Practices thus form an effective vehicle for leading children by example both passively through role models and actively through ensuring that they emulate Muslim adults.

Medina: Inside and outside the school

Parental choice and economic investment

The financial commitment of parents who send their children to independent Muslim schools has been discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to School A and School B. In contrast, particularly to School B, the research suggests that parents of pupils at Medina Primary, at least marginally, had greater access to economic resources. There was a general consensus among managerial staff that parents who were economically committed to paying fees typically valued and placed an emphasis on the importance of Islamic education for their children. In relation to voluntary-aided status, the head expressed a concern that the absence of fees might attract interest from Muslim parents who would not otherwise have considered sending their children to a Muslim school. For the head, once fees were removed the question for parents would be reduced to:

A Muslim school or a non-Muslim school? OK, we'll put them in the Muslim school. Not because they particularly want a Muslim school, but just because it's not a non-Muslim school.

The implications of parent's economic commitment to Medina Primary represented a recurring theme in interviews with the *Qur'an* teacher. Parents were considered stakeholders who had been active through economic commitment. The relationship was a two-way one between parents as active stakeholders and the school as provider. Subsequently, the school became responsible for provision 'over and above just the national curriculum with Muslim teachers' (*Qur'an* teacher, Medina Primary). Thus the economic investment of parents had an important bearing on their relationship with the school. Their position as active stakeholders not only showed their commitment to the cause, but also highlighted the school's responsibilities in terms of satisfactory provision.

Parental involvement

In addition to their role as active economic stakeholders, parents were also active in engaging with Medina Primary outside of school hours. Attendance at Friday prayers in the *Masjid* at the end of the school day was a regular occurrence, with a visiting Imam leading prayer. In addition parents, friends of parents and Muslim members of the surrounding community would attend. The *Qur'an* teacher explained that part of the rationale for community involvement on a Friday was the requirement for a valid congregation to include at least four men (in addition to the Imam) for Friday prayer. As the majority of the staff at Medina were women, a visiting Imam, along with encouragement for men in particular to attend, would increase the chance of having a valid congregation. In the event that fewer than four men were present the format for prayers remained

the same as daily prayers during the week. For the *Qur'an* teacher, attendance for Friday prayers represented one of the ways in which parents and the surrounding community 'fed back' into the ethos of the school. He explained:

You see people regularly and they're definitely contributing and taking part... It's nice for them to come in and see the school and see what we're doing.

The two way nature of the relationship between parents and members of the surrounding community with Medina Primary demonstrated the most explicit way in which ethos both extended beyond the school walls, and was influenced by outside factors.

Continuity between the home and the school

The influence of parents on the ethos of the school was considered an important factor at Medina. Attitudes towards this were reflected in the admissions policy. There was an overall emphasis on striving for a balance in admitting the children of parents who reinforced the values promoted by the school in their home life. The head's view was:

It's no good us saying we're a Muslim school with a distinctive ethos, if none of the parents follow, or support the ethos in a practical sense.

This conviction demonstrated the importance placed on parents applying values promoted in the school in their everyday lives. The implications of this were that the ethos at Medina Primary was consistent with children's attitudes and experiences outside the school. These attitudes and experiences were influential factors influencing the school's ethos as a whole.

Coming to decisions in the admissions process necessarily required careful attention. Although the principal aim was to admit parents who reflected the values promoted at Medina Primary in their home lives, the managerial staff were also careful to avoid an over-exclusive policy. The assistant head explained that ‘a lot of interviewing’ took place with prospective parents, as the key aim for Medina was to provide a service for the community. Although the school emphasised the importance of prospective parents reflecting the values at the school in their home lives, the assistant head explained that there was a mix of parents ranging from active practising Muslims to those who practised less. With parents fitting the latter profile, the intention was to:

...have a positive impact on those families. ...we’ve had parents coming in and saying “it’s made a radical difference to us because my child is coming home and talking about what they’ve learnt and displaying love for *Allah* and creation...”

This illustrates a perception among the management staff that values promoted in the home represented an important factor in pupils’ experience of ethos at Medina Primary. Although continuity and mutual reinforcement between the school and the home represented a preferred model, approaches to admissions were not exclusive to parents who fit the mould. When there was less continuity or mutual reinforcement, the school emphasised the importance of its having a positive influence.

Intake

As outlined in Chapter 5, and consistently with the profile of staff, the intake at Medina was ethnically diverse. Although reluctant to discuss ethnicity, the head described the intake as being ‘predominantly from a Gujarati background, but not

by very much'. The remaining intake at the school was very diverse. A projection from the school was that for families, English was the most common first language spoken in the home, French was the second main language, Gujarati the third most common and Arabic the fourth. Because the majority of local Gujarati adults were predominantly second or third generation members of a settled migrant community, English was typically the language most used in the home alongside Gujarati. The profile of the community explains the projection of Gujarati as only the third most commonly spoken language, even though Gujaratis constituted the largest single ethnic group at Medina Primary. Other languages spoken by families at the school included Bengali, Italian, Punjabi, Somali, Tamil and Urdu.

A year 3 teacher explained how the diversity of the school's intake impacted on approaches to teaching. In the earliest years children were taught 'the main aspects of Islam' (year 3 teacher, Medina Primary) so that content was universally relevant. However, children would occasionally contribute in classes in a way which facilitated discussions of parents' differing approaches to practice. These discussions would provide an opportunity for children to learn from each other's experiences. However the main approach adopted overall at Medina Primary was to focus on universally relevant themes when delivering Islamic content.

In addition to the ethnic diversity at Medina Primary, the intake was also diverse in terms of distances between family residences and the school. Whilst the majority of Gujarati children reflected the nearby community, the school did not

necessarily serve families in close proximity to the school. Consistent with the profile of intake at School A prior to entering the voluntary-aided sector, Medina Primary attracted families who lived outside the city. Some families travelled sizable distances. For example, many parents brought their children each day from a town on the outskirts of the county. The particular town had a sizable Bengali community, and some families had moved from the town to the city primarily to make it easier for their children to attend the school.

Community relations

In line with the overall approach to teaching children from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, Medina Primary did not hold an affiliation with any one particular Mosque. The head explained that this approach had been intentional from the school's inception. The aim was to avoid being labelled as an exclusive extension of any one particular community, Mosque or school of thought. A positive outcome of this approach can be seen in the nature of the intake in terms of ethnic diversity and in the attendance by families from different areas of the city/county. The head explained that the limitation of this approach was that there was no one community or Mosque which could be approached during fund raising exercises.

In addition to parental involvement in Friday prayers, there were other ways in which the communities served by the school took an active role at Medina. One form this took was to address issues of travel for families who did not live in close proximity to the school. Minibus drivers had been working with the school since the early stages on site at the independent Islamic organisation. A group of

minibus drivers, who worked for *madrassas* and another Muslim school in the same city, would organise school runs for children. This operated independently of the school in that there were no ‘school buses’, but rather parents in relevant communities had made arrangements with the drivers themselves. The head or other staff members would introduce interested parents to drivers in the mornings or at home times, but the process took place largely outside the control of the school. Although essentially promoting business, the casual service provided by minibus drivers alleviated the pressure for some families who lived at great distances from the school.

Medina Primary was also taking steps to initiate more involvement with local communities/communities served by the school. The main example of this at the time of the research was the securing of a school allotment nearby. The *Qur’an* teacher described the location as such that a class of children could walk there within five minutes. However, the size of the plot secured would also facilitate a ‘community plot’ (*Qur’an* teacher), in addition to a plot set aside for classes. In addition to parental involvement in Friday prayers and arranging minibus services, the school also had an active role in community relations. Outside influences necessarily had an influence on the school as a whole, and represented an important strand of ethos. Parental involvement, parent’s position as active stakeholders, the diversity of intake and active community relations with the school all represented important influences for ethos at Medina Primary. The above clearly demonstrates that the ethos existed beyond the school building, and consistent with the definition in the methodology, constituted both internal and external influences in constant flux.

Ethos at Medina primary can be seen to embody the fundamental conviction expressed by the head: a predominantly Islamic ethos will necessarily lead to providing a good education. This chapter has demonstrated that Medina represented an Islamic institution which had taken the form of a school, and as such has a responsibility for educational provision. The school's family-based origins were apparent in nearly all aspects of ethos. Initially the head and deputy head had sought the Islamic environment for the education of their own children. The fulfilment of national curriculum requirements developed along with the school's growth, although a heavy emphasis on Islamicisation of material remained. An all-Muslim staff led children by example through exercising Islam as 'a lived way of life' (Hussain 2004: 322), and the extent of community relations demonstrates that Medina Primary's ethos extended far beyond educational provision. In effect the ethos at the school represented an organic example of Islam as a way of life in practice...

Chapter 7: An In-Depth Analysis of Ethos at Hiqmah School

This chapter will discuss themes which arose from the qualitative analysis of data collected at Hiqmah School. Some of the concepts discussed throughout will be consistent with those which developed from Medina Primary, but the individual nature of each school and the ways in which these are manifested in the qualitative analysis mean that similar/parallel concepts may be discussed in different contexts. A good example is that the concept of *practices* which arose at Medina Primary was discussed heavily in relation to the higher-level concept of *leading children by example*, whereas at Hiqmah School *practices* were discussed much more in relation to providing an *Islamic ethos*. It is for this reason that some parallel/similar concepts found in both schools may be discussed in relation to seemingly differing contexts.

This chapter will discuss four higher level concepts through relevant subsections. The first section, *Becoming voluntary-aided*, will discuss the school's transition from independent to voluntary-aided status and immediate implications of state funding. Secondly, the chapter will discuss the process of *Providing an Islamic ethos* at Hiqmah School before moving on to discuss *Educational Objectives*. Finally the section entitled *Community relations* will discuss the school's intake, staff profile and community relations more generally.

Becoming voluntary-aided

The background of Hiqmah School has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5; the implications of the transition from independent to voluntary-aided status as part of that background will be discussed in the next subsection. Throughout interviews with the head at Hiqmah School, as with Nasira (see Chapter 4), there was a strong conviction that the school's ethos had not changed over time, nor in relation to the school's status as voluntary-aided. Owing to the length of time that she had been at the school, the head's retrospective account provided the primary source of information on the history of the school and the process of moving to voluntary-aided status. The process of analysis necessarily takes a three-pronged approach owing to the development of the following problems/solutions:

- Distinctive elements of ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School will be highlighted and discussed in terms of similarities or differences to give insights into the way status may affect ethos in each case;
- However, as the research took place *after* Hiqmah School had become voluntary-aided it is not possible to conclude whether status as independent or voluntary-aided *necessarily* affects ethos;
- Therefore consistencies with Nasira's narratives of School A and School B will be used to contextualise similarities/differences between Medina Primary and Hiqmah School.

For example if x became y in Nasira's account of transition in both Schools A and School B, and x is the case in Medina and y is the case in Hiqmah then such

differences can be more firmly attributed to each school's status as either independent or voluntary-aided.

Transition to voluntary-aided status

Arriving at Hiqmah School for the first time was a completely different experience to that at Medina Primary. The school itself resembled a large Victorian-looking building from the outside, but on entering, the reception area was furnished with contemporary fittings, giving the feel of a professional workspace. Entering the building required using an electronic buzzer monitored by a camera. The reception office itself was situated to the left behind a glass screen with a hatch, the only point of access between office staff and visitors. Under the hatch was a small desk-space with a signing in-book for visitors to fill in. Running the length of the room from the sealed office was a large electronically activated metal barrier, around four feet high, the design (satin 'brushed' steel) in keeping with the contemporary feel of the reception area. The teaching staff, management staff offices, classrooms, children, indeed the school itself, was all behind the large metal barrier, the electronic keypad being wall mounted to one side on the school side of the divide. The impact felt on entering this initial space as a visitor was that the school was a professional institution (see discussions of normative isomorphism throughout this chapter [7] and Chapters 4 and 8) with protocols. The school felt like a workspace to which access had to be granted by administrative or management staff at each and every visit. Moreover, the reception area itself seemed like a statement, highlighting the school's status as voluntary-aided.

On entering the state sector Hiqmah School went through several processes with differing effects on the school. The head's narrative indicated that the profile of the staff had remained consistent throughout the school's history. A strong focus on educational provision informed the appointment of approximately equal numbers of Muslim and non-Muslim teaching staff at Hiqmah. In contrast to School A, the profile of teaching staff had remained consistent largely due to an education-centred focus consistent throughout the history of the school. Hiqmah School had been founded by the head, a former teacher. Whilst in the independent sector, all teaching staff were qualified at the time when alternative financial options were considered for the future of the school. A fundamental criterion was that the school would not have to make major changes to the curriculum, and subsequently parents elected to apply for grant-maintained status. The application was for the school to be one form entry so as to maintain the ethos that had developed until that point, and also to retain the approximately equal mix of Muslim and non-Muslim staff as it was felt that recruitment might become difficult if the school increased in size.

Resources

With the transition to grant-maintained status and subsequently voluntary-aided status (see Chapter 5) the resources at Hiqmah School were indicative of the financial support of state funding. One of the most apparent benefits of state funding was the nature of the school building (for an in-depth description see Chapter 5). Following approval for state funding in January 1998 Hiqmah School subsequently relocated in September 2002 to a larger, purpose-built school building within which the original research for this thesis took place in

2008. Characteristics which distinguished the building (by comparison with Medina Primary) included ‘a purpose built ICT (Information and Communications Technology) suite housing 30 computers for individual use, a sports hall, canteen facilities and a purpose built Mosque’ (Hiqmah School prospectus).

The kinds of resources in use at Hiqmah School were also distinctive and indicative of the school’s voluntary-aided status. For example there were ceiling-mounted projectors present in every classroom, and multimedia resources via the internet or other medium were in use at the time of the research. During a session of observation in the year 4 class ‘Teacher’s TV: sciencetube’ a feature on popular video hosting website youtube, was used to show a film via the projector as part of a science lesson. Once internet access is paid for the website and its contents are free to access and thus it was the presence of projectors in classes which made delivery of the contents possible. Accordingly, computers had been installed in all of the school classrooms which observation was conducted in. Specifically, nursery, reception L, reception 2 and year 5/6 classrooms contained one computer each, whereas year 1/2, year 2, year 3/4, year 4, year 5, and year 6 classrooms all contained two computers each. The emphasis on such provision indicated an aim to facilitate the delivery of multimedia resources to all classes, a level of provision which would have been an unrealistic aim for Muslim schools in the independent sector.

Other less explicit indicators of state funding and the ability to provide resources were also evident. For example, each classroom had at least one leather-bound

hardback copy of the *Qur'an* (with many classrooms having two or more) and there was evidence in most classrooms that there was a general aim to provide individual level resources (for example one calculator per child). During observation in a year 2 class the teacher employed a large red pointer with an oversized finger on the end to assist children in reading off the board which indicated access to resources beyond the absolutely essential. In addition, the most striking demonstration of access to resources was the fact that children's uniforms matched the furniture in relevant classrooms. The uniform scheme at Hiqmah School was primarily divided up into red for reception and all of key stage 1 (typically all children in classes covering the curriculum for years 1-3 although year 3/4 wore blue uniforms), and blue for key stage 2 (for years 4-6), with the nursery wearing a yellow uniform.

Classrooms were furnished so as to indicate the children's education level in accordance with the colour of their uniforms. Thus, all children's tables and chairs in key stage 1 and reception classes were red, key stage 2 classes contained blue tables and chairs, and yellow chairs were in use in the nursery. The differing sizes, shapes and styles of tables meant that there was variation with the amount of colour on show. For example, some tables were clearly new and featured all-red/blue surfaces, thus boldly demonstrating the educational level of the children in the class to the visitor (this seemed to be more typical in key stage 1 and mixed age group classes). Some classes contained tables with non-distinct surfaces but either red or blue trim corresponding to children's uniforms, and so although less apparent, the theme remained. The level of attention to detail evident in the consistency between uniforms and children's

furniture further indicated that resources extended beyond the essential, and demonstrated a commitment to indicating the educational level visually throughout the school.

The environment of classrooms at Hiqmah had some common traits with that experienced at Medina Primary. For example, the classroom walls were adorned with displays which children and teachers had made. The year 1/2 class had a paints display of children's handprints, each one labelled with a child's name. In addition there were displays with Islamic content alongside educational displays, although the greater proportion of displays were education based. The effect of this was that the environment felt more distinctly like a school classroom, than the classes at Medina. Although perfectly adequate, classrooms at Medina at times felt like a family environment, particularly as teachers often sat with the children on the floor during tasks. Teachers did sit with children in the same way at Hiqmah, though not as frequently, and the feel of the classroom left no doubt that I was in a school. At Medina, particularly with smaller classes, the atmosphere could easily develop into a homely experience, momentarily tricking the senses that the setting was a more intimate one than a classroom.

Another distinction between the feel of the two environments was that of the displays or signs mounted at Medina containing Arabic, the majority included the Arabic *abjad*. In contrast, the majority of Arabic signs at Hiqmah used phonetic Arabic, with phrases written in the English/Latin-based alphabet. However, there were clear similarities with Medina where signs were mounted with Islamic references. For example, there was a display on the topic of friendship in the

year 3/4 classroom which read ‘friends: help them, trust them, we as Muslims should be kind to our friends’, and within the same classroom there was an ‘Islamic manners’ display. A display reading ‘messengers of *Allah* said “woe to him who tells lies to make people laugh! Woe to him! Woe to him!”’ was present in both the year 5/6 classroom and the reception L class, and each classroom had a ‘*hadith* of the week’ display near the door.

Typically, the majority of available wall space in classrooms at Hiqmah would be covered with displays. The larger displays with educational content included a numeracy display in the year 5 classroom outlining ‘7 steps to solve a problem’, a ‘punctuation pyramid’ in the year 3/4 classroom and two ‘word pyramids’ either side of the dry wipe board in the year 5/6 classroom, all of which were observed being used by teachers to explain lesson content. Another clear distinction between the classroom environments at Medina and Hiqmah, was that there were particularly elaborate displays at Hiqmah based on references to popular children’s stories, often depicting animals. This sometimes took the form of cuddly toys being part of displays. For example, in the year 2 classroom there was a stuffed toy lion pinned to a wall-mounted display on science.

Furthermore, within the year 5 classroom there was an elaborate ‘Harry Potter’ display including pictures of brooms and wands. Predictably, the presence of cuddly toys and displays focused on fairytales were more prominent within the nursery and reception classes. The nursery classroom had large painted displays including references to ‘the Billy-goats gruff’ (with cuddly toys) and ‘the hungry caterpillar’. In the reception L classroom, there was another ‘Billy-goats gruff’

display including a painting of a 'troll' and also a 'modern rhymes' display with pictures of a 'gingerbread man', 'little red riding hood' and 'Goldie Locks and the three bears'. The representation of animals and people within displays was present at Medina Primary, but only in a very small number of instances, and there was no reference to characters or concepts from fairytales within the school. The reception L and reception 2 classrooms also had 'welcome' displays mounted, comprised of photographs of each of the children in the class. Furthermore, in addition to the presence of the displays, references to fairytales or more recent children's media (e.g. the Harry Potter books/films) were made by teachers during lessons at Hiqmah on several occasions during the research.

In addition to the apparent abundance of resources, there was also a subset of resources at Hiqmah School which had a clearly standardised form, indicative of the school's status as state funded. For example, every classroom contained the same globe, three standardised maps: the world, Europe and the British Isles and a poster depicting various musical instruments. There were also seemingly standardised displays on classroom walls for solving word problems, signs which read 'we always try our best' and a display reading 'when there's nothing to say, say nothing' with a picture of a boy who bore no distinctive signs of religious faith. The same musical instrument posters were also on display in open areas, and upper reception had a 'making music' display. The level of consistency in posters and wall charts was clearly indicative of the influence of the state sector and indicated a standardisation of certain resources.

The standardisation of resources following Hiqmah's transition into the state sector represents an example of normative isomorphism as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). DiMaggio and Powell argue that normative isomorphism stems primarily from professionalisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). They argue further that professionalisation is as much assigned by the state as it is created by the activities of the professions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). For normative isomorphism, one important aspect of professionalisation is the growth and elaboration of networks which span organisations, and across which models diffuse rapidly (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). Drawing on observations at Hiqmah, voluntary-aided status, having been assigned by the state, has had implications for professionalisation at the school through increased access to resources. Furthermore, the consistent distribution of standardised resources indicates that a particular model of the voluntary-aided Muslim school may have been diffused to Hiqmah through the school's voluntary-aided status.

Infrastructure

The above discussion of the systematic matching of furniture and uniforms at each educational level is just one example of infrastructural features at Hiqmah School that differed to Medina Primary. In addition to increased access to resources, the size of the school's intake, the profile of staff, class structures and some areas of the RE curriculum all differed from Medina. Some of these differences can be explained by Hiqmah's status as voluntary-aided, while others diverged from School A and School B and so are less easily explained by status.

The presence of mixed ability classes at Hiqmah School to cater for a larger intake was one of the key differences from Medina Primary. Although both schools were oversubscribed, the lack of tuition fees at Hiqmah School could explain the larger numbers of interested parents. The head of teaching and learning explained that each year there were between 200-300 applicants for 30 available places. Between 42 and 45 applicants would be successful in entering the reception classes as the result of appeals, and so following from the upper reception class, mixed year group classes had developed to cater for the extra children, hence year 1/2, year 3/4, and year 5/6 classes.

The deputy head explained that this process had developed directly in relation to an increase in intake over time. A relatively recent development, with the final addition of year 5/6 during the academic year 2006/2007, had been to admit more pupils while retaining a particular pupil-teacher ratio, with 1:28 being mentioned by interviewees. Methods were employed to deliver exactly the same curriculum to children in the mixed year groups. The deputy head explained that mixed year groups had two curriculum cycles whereby initially the objectives and topics in the year 2 curriculum would be covered in the first year, whilst objectives for the year 1 curriculum would be covered in the second year. This approach ensured that over time all children in the mixed year groups received the same curriculum content as those in single year group classes. At the end of each academic year the upper half of each mixed year group would become the lower half of the subsequent mixed class cohort (e.g. year 1/2 children who were of the same age as children in year 2 would move to become the younger section of year 3/4 at the beginning of the next academic year). The presence of mixed year groups

demonstrated the school's sustainability and ability to manage growth as a voluntary-aided school.

In contrast to the narratives of School A and School B, particular elements of infrastructure had remained constant following Hiqmah School's transition into the state sector. Specifically, the consistent profile of teaching staff represented a clear contrast to processes of re-staffing which had happened at School A and which were going to be inevitable for School B. Consistently with Medina Primary, whilst in the independent sector both School A and School B had employed teaching staff on the basis of the individual's suitability for the job, rather than requiring formal teaching qualifications. The transition to voluntary-aided status had necessarily required replacing unqualified teachers with formally qualified staff. The trend for appointing non-Muslim teachers also became more apparent for School A after acquiring state funding, and staff at School B were exclusively Muslim prior to the transition to voluntary-aided status. In contrast, the policies at Hiqmah School concerning the appointment of teaching staff had remained consistent over time. Interview data from the head, head of teaching and learning and the deputy head revealed a consistent aim to employ a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim staff from the earliest stages of the study group's development into a school. Furthermore, the re-staffing was not necessary as all relevant staff held formal teaching qualifications prior to the transition to grant-maintained status. It is worth noting that Hiqmah School's move into the state sector via grant-maintained status differed from the current process of going directly to voluntary-aided status. This unusual trajectory may explain some differences from the narratives of School A and School B.

Drawing on the theoretical underpinning of the thesis as outlined in Chapter 2, the above indicates that Hiqmah School experienced processes of coercive isomorphism (as defined by DiMaggio and Powell) prior to entering the state sector. According to DiMaggio and Powell, ‘coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations on which they are dependent, and by cultural expectations in the society within which organisations function’ (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 67). These pressures may take the form of force, persuasion or an invitation to ‘join in’ (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 67). The fact that Hiqmah maintained qualified staff whilst in the independent sector indicates that for an extended time prior to acquiring state funding, the school conformed to expectations met by other schools within the state sector. Although there is clear crossover here with the processes of mimetic isomorphism which occurred at School A and School B (see Chapter 4), Hiqmah took on qualified staff under different circumstances. At School A and School B, employing qualified staff was one requirement fulfilled by the schools in exchange for the financial sustainability afforded by voluntary-aided status. At Hiqmah, qualified staff were taken on whilst in the independent sector, indicating that the head’s previous experience and expectations of what a school should be informed the initiative. Consistently with Nasira, the head at Hiqmah served as the conduit for transferring a particular school model through mimetic isomorphism. In the case of Hiqmah, the model transferred when the head founded the school had qualified staff as an integral characteristic. Subsequently Hiqmah School’s shift to voluntary-aided status has had little effect on the profile of its staff.

Providing an Islamic ethos

Ethos in grant-maintained and voluntary-aided contexts

Although certain isomorphic changes in infrastructure are explained by Hiqmah's current status as voluntary-aided, the head firmly held the conviction that the school's ethos had not changed over time. She explained that one of the key areas of concern, when considering options for the future of the school, involved considering sacrifices and changes which might have to be made. In the words of the head: 'The reason we decided to go ahead was that we felt that we wouldn't have to make any changes and we could continue operating the way we were' (the apparent paradox of actively pursuing what would be a significant change for the school as a whole, with the stipulation that it would only be accepted if no change was apparent, will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter [7], and in Chapter 8). Throughout the school's transition to voluntary-aided status the emphasis on providing an Islamic ethos, or distinctive religious character (terminology currently applied to faith schools in England and Wales), has remained constant. Initial options for the school were to apply for grant-maintained status. This involved an application directly to the DfES with the school's funding being directly allocated from central government. Hiqmah School received state funding and operated for a year from September 1998 to July 1999 before grant-maintained status was abolished. Available options presented to the school were to become either a community school or a voluntary-aided school. The head explained that the voluntary-aided route was seen to be more appropriate as the school could remain linked with a local Islamic trust (of the same name as Hiqmah) which had promoted it, and thus could continue to appoint foundation governors. The head's conviction that the

school's ethos had not changed was demonstrated when asked what the ethos was like prior to and following the transition into the state sector. She said:

It was very similar to the ethos that we have now where they have the opportunity to be able to be who they are, not to be afraid of talking about their own personal experiences in any way. To have the opportunity to pray at midday if they wish to, to learn *Qur'an* in school parallel to other subjects, to be exposed to Arabic, to be able to learn about Islam, and to have the opportunity to ask the questions that worried them or that they were curious about, and for us to be able to respond to those.

The objective of providing an Islamic ethos can be seen as a consistent theme as initially the school would not have entered the state if managerial staff had felt that large changes would have to be made. Subsequently, when faced with the option of becoming a community school, the head and managerial staff decided to continue providing an Islamic ethos through opting for voluntary-aided status. Choosing this option allowed the school to retain ties with the local Islamic trust.

The role of Arabic in everyday school life

Overall the ways in which Arabic language represented a manifestation of Islamic ethos at Hiqmah School was substantially different to the model at Medina Primary, although there were some similarities. The general use of Arabic in the school included referring to male and female staff members as *ustad* and *ustada* and using phrases such as *insh'Allah* and *masha'Allah* in everyday school life. The bulk of this interaction occurred between children and staff with certain standardised protocols routinely requiring the use of Arabic in the classroom. For example, whenever the register was taken for a given class the teacher would read out names alphabetically with '*assalamu alaikum*' preceding each name, with children replying '*walaikum salam*'. Although the

formality of applying Arabic to everyday school life was consistent with Medina Primary's practice, the use of Arabic between staff members and staff and children was far less apparent at Hiqmah School. One explanation for this could be the contrasting profiles of staff. Although non-Muslim staff members did employ Arabic in certain areas of school life, their position as non-Muslims suggests that they would be less likely to use Arabic impulsively in communication. Muslim staff members did use Arabic phrases when talking to non-Muslims, however this was rarely reciprocated, and the use of Arabic between two non-Muslim staff members would have been highly unlikely. When discussing the use of Arabic among non-Muslim staff members the head summarised:

Those established staff who are really committed to the ethos would use the etiquette language throughout the school day, and those who don't wish to, well that's a choice. Other than *assalamu alaikum* the rest of the etiquettes are very much a matter of choice

The extent to which Arabic was used in classrooms varied depending on the class and teacher. For example, Arabic phrases were used sporadically from teacher to child during my period of observation of years 2, 3/4, 5/6, and 6. However, they were far less apparent when I was observing years 1/2 and 4, even though teachers of those classes at the times they were observed were all Muslims. The year 4 teacher explained that Arabic phrases in the Islamic context consistently referred back to God as a central point of reference. For example the phrase *jazak'Allah* would be used in place of 'thank you' even though the two phrases would be largely interchangeable on the surface. He explained:

When something good happens we link it to God, *jazak'Allah*: thank you to God. *Masha'Allah* is 'God provided you strength to do this', it's like 'well done'. And for me the meaning of *assalamu alaikum* is 'may God wish you happiness, well being'. So that's what we say [in place of]

‘hello’ to each other, that’s all combined in a word *assalamu alaikum*. And if you say *assalam wa rahmatullah-i-wa barakatuhu* that is the complete: ‘may God be with you, with his blessings and his kindness’. So these kinds of things for me are very important for a child.

Interestingly, although he expressed the importance of Arabic phrases above, they were used comparatively sparingly by the year 4 teacher. The year 5 teacher, herself a non-Muslim, represented a good example of the school’s approach to the use of Arabic among non-Muslim staff outlined by the head above. In the classroom the register was called by using *assalamu alaikum* prior to reading out children’s names, but no other Arabic phrases were used by the teacher herself. The year 5 teacher explained that, although familiar with some phrases, she preferred to use English as she ‘didn’t know enough Arabic to speak it’ and the class were all English speakers. Although there were variations from class to class in general, teachers’ identity as either Muslim or non-Muslim invariably represented an explanatory factor in the variable use of Arabic between teacher and child from class to class.

However, it is worth noting that although less frequently than at Medina overall, children did sporadically use Arabic phrases in child-to-child interaction throughout all levels of the school. There was no indication that the class teacher’s identity as Muslim or non-Muslim affected the frequency with which children used Arabic phrases between themselves. Certain formal consistencies may explain this, such as the use of *assalamu alaikum* when opening the register and the consistent use of *salam* greetings between children and present adults at the beginning of all classes. However, the use of Arabic at Hiqmah School and Medina Primary represented two distinct models. At Medina Primary Arabic

was an integral part of all communication between staff and children and represented a central strand of the school's Islamic ethos. The use of Arabic at Hiqmah School was more sporadic and identified the school as Islamic in a more formal way through employing blanket protocols such as using the prefixes *ustad* and *ustada* with staff, or establishing minimum etiquette levels such as that described by the head in relation to appointing non-Muslim staff. Thus, whereas Arabic was used impulsively and frequently at Medina Primary, this differed from the more formal application of Arabic at Hiqmah School. The role of Arabic in the curriculum will be discussed in-depth and detail under the section *Educational objectives* later on in this chapter.

Practices and values

As with Medina Primary, School A and School B, developing children's ability to practise represented a central necessary part of the Islamic ethos at Hiqmah School. Taking into consideration prior experiences at Medina Primary the initial point of reference when considering children's development as practising Muslims was approaches to prayer. Hiqmah School had a purpose built Mosque on site visually demonstrating the importance of prayer for the school. However there were conflicting accounts in interviews and general conversation with staff concerning whether it was compulsory for children to attend daily prayers during part of the lunch break. Three views were expressed by managerial staff and class teachers with some stating that children were firmly encouraged and others explaining children could attend if they so wished. Deductive analysis revealed that prayers were more likely to be compulsory. Consistently with recurring themes in Chapter 2, and approaches to practices at Medina Primary, children

were expected to have developed basic levels of practising by the age of 10 years old. When asked specifically which practices were encouraged in the children the head of teaching and learning explained:

Learning how to pray definitely and the ablution [*wudu*] leading on to the prayer. Giving the opportunity to observe fasting and so on. Letting them know about *zakat* and charity, *Hajj* pilgrimage, making them aware of what it is and why it's so important and so on. Basically teaching the 5 pillars... We encourage key stage 2 to fast [during Ramadan] and that's an option, it's not enforced. Key stage 1 we do try and discourage really, but if they want to fast and practise for half a day, or two hours, that's fine.

In relation to prayer children were primarily taught necessary practices in the on-site Mosque at Hiqmah School, although there were other resources too such as "My *Wudu* Book" and a "How to Pray *Salat*" display. Approaches to prayer would also be discussed in everyday classes, with most classrooms containing displays demonstrating how to pray, and children would also learn from peers outside of school. The deputy head explained how children were taught to pray, and the way that lunchtime was divided to accommodate daily prayers:

Depending on the year group some will be shown, some will be doing it maybe with a tape recorder having someone showing them. It could be older people showing them and a lot is done in the Mosque. I'm there or I will train somebody to do that element as well. So they'll pick that up as they go and they'll also do it if they do it at home. ...there's a timetable where they rotate different activities so they play, they have lunch and then they go to the Mosque as well. It's part of the different activities that they do at lunchtime.

In contrast to Medina Primary, the Mosque at Hiqmah School was specifically used for praying and was not used for sports or as a school hall, with children attending during lunchtime from year 1 and up.

The role of practices and values at both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School was highly integrated with practices acting as a necessary mechanism for demonstrating values in the Islamic context. Thus, although the distinction between promoting respect and using etiquettes can be seen as distinct from each other, they become necessarily related in practice. For example, in the mornings children would do an *adab* which would involve reading a prayer before registration in addition to *hadith* of the week or *Qur'an* of the week on Mondays during circle time. Although these can be seen as practices on the surface, they had implications for the development of children's values in an ongoing process. This was demonstrated on my arrival each day with children being encouraged to welcome visitors using *salam* greetings encompassing elements of etiquette and *adab*. *Salam* greetings were used by children when teachers entered classrooms and during assemblies where the deputy head would address children as a group and they would return the greeting.

Underlying aspects of practices ranged from the practical and educational to emotional and spiritual wellbeing. For example, when asked to describe the school in terms of values the head of teaching and learning outlined the central broad aim as 'providing an Islamic education in an environment which will develop the child both emotionally and academically.' More specifically the deputy head outlined key values such as promoting a caring attitude, respect for one another, respect for other faiths, respect for all teachers 'because we don't just have Muslim teachers as you've noticed, tolerating each other and really care. It's all of those aspects really'. The deputy head acknowledged that whilst the values outlined might be present in non-faith schools, the rationale behind

developing such values at Hiqmah was for children to develop as good Muslims. Consistently with convictions held at Medina Primary, at Hiqmah School it was held that promoting values as part of the Islamic ethos would have a social benefit as well as a spiritual one. The deputy head summarised that Hiqmah was: ‘ensuring that children grow up to be good Muslims, and as a good Muslim you should be able to go out in that community and work well with whoever is out there really.’

The year 5 teacher, a non-Muslim, explained broader objectives of the school from her own perspective. She explained that for her of primary importance was that the children could practise Islam in an environment where Islamic objectives and the national curriculum ‘go hand in hand’. When asked about the nature of the relationship between the national curriculum objectives and the school’s Islamic provision, the year 5 teacher explained that there were consistencies between her experiences at Hiqmah School and experiences teaching in a Catholic school. When discussing both experiences she emphasised the relationship between the school and the relevant place of worship in balancing educational and spiritual objectives:

I think its how the school adapts it to their needs. I’ve taught at a Catholic school and it’s the same. You go to the Mass on a Wednesday depending when celebrations would be celebrated, so I feel it’s how the school and the relationship maybe with the nearby Mosque, or their own Mosque, so I just feel it’s how the school adapts it to the curriculum.

It is also worth noting that the Mosque at Hiqmah School was also regularly used by the surrounding community, and therefore, as was the case with Medina Primary, ethos at Hiqmah School was heavily influenced by the surrounding community (there will be a full discussion under the section *Community relations*

later in this chapter). As it was a voluntary-aided school its admission policy prioritised a primarily local intake, meaning that a large proportion of community members who used the Mosque were likely to have children at the school. Interviews and conversations with staff revealed that supplementary classes were also offered at the Mosque for children outside of school hours, and that many pupils from Hiqmah attended. The supplementary classes, everyday use of the Mosque by the surrounding community and the presence of school children at the Mosque outside of school hours all demonstrated that children's experiences of practices and values extended beyond the school timetable.

In addition, RE was also used as a mechanism for promoting values through content, and the everyday practices too contextualised the values promoted. The deputy head explained:

The Islamic etiquettes that are to be used within the classroom, they're standard etiquettes like *jazak'Allah khair* which means "thank you", *bismillah* when they start their work, *alhamdulillah* when they've finished, so it's encouraged throughout. If I see someone walking beautifully then "well done", if I don't then I'll remind them "this is how you walk", holding the door, the manners aspect of it, which should be done throughout.

The year 4 teacher described values at a more specific level, abstracted from the necessary relationship with practices. In keeping with accounts above of referring practices and values back to an Islamic point of reference, he described an underlying emphasis on spiritual development informing the values that the school promoted:

Personally I would make them understand what the reason behind, for example these *hadith* and *Qur'an*, to develop the spiritual part of you. Rituals are important, that they pray, but for me, it's like my aim, that the children should know the spiritual reasons of why they do prayers. I

mean I don't think there's any point [praying] if you're spiritually not present.

Practices and values at Hiqmah School represented a complex relationship. Habitual practice was informed by values and in turn values were reaffirmed through practices. The emphasis on the spiritual benefit in relation to values and Islamic points of reference contextualised the habitual use of practices in the reaffirmation process.

Educational objectives

One of the key distinctive qualities of the ethos at Hiqmah School was a duality of Islamic objectives and requirements for voluntary-aided status ('V/A requirements' from here on in). This distinction does not imply that educational and Islamic objectives are mutually exclusive or dichotomous. However, V/A requirements, inherently tied to the school's position within the state sector, were an important part of ethos at Hiqmah School. V/A requirements were not exclusively manifested in the school's curriculum. Rather, analysis revealed that they influenced all aspects of the school. The implications of this were that there was a duality of ethos at Hiqmah School comprising Islamic and V/A requirements. At Medina Primary all elements of the school's ethos were Islamically informed, with an all-Muslim staff leading children by example and a completely Islamicised curriculum, with the conviction that 'a good education would follow' (head, Medina Primary). This section will demonstrate the ways in which ethos at Hiqmah School had developed from a foundation where educational objectives had always been of central importance. Whereas Medina

Primary represented an Islamic environment which happened to be a school and subsequently had an educational responsibility to children, Hiqmah School clearly represented a school focused on educational objectives and V/A requirements, but which also fostered Islamic provision. The following subsections will demonstrate the ways in which ethos as a whole at Hiqmah School embodied the two parallel streams, one centred around Islamic provision, and the other around fulfilling V/A requirements.

Curriculum

The origins of the school and the head's background as the school's founder can be seen to explain the emphasis on educational objectives at Hiqmah School. The head explained that as a former teacher her approaches to the curriculum were her main area of expertise when starting the school. The fundamental aim of the curriculum at Hiqmah School had been to educate children 'in a well rounded way' (head, Hiqmah), with objectives being that children would have a chance of being likely candidates for higher education. In addition to these objectives the head placed equal emphasis on the social benefit that the school could offer Muslim children as they 'need to be prepared for a world which is multicultural, multi-faith, and they need to be confident people in themselves' (head, Hiqmah). This objective echoes Berglund's analysis of IRE as a mechanism for providing connectedness between children, Islamic identity and the wider context of Swedish society (Berglund 2009: 200). The emphasis on educational objectives at Hiqmah School can be clearly contextualised when considering trends in the underperformance of children from predominantly Muslim communities in education generally. When asked if one of the key

objectives at Hiqmah School had been to 'level the playing field' for Muslim children the head responded:

One can put it like that. One of my fears as an educator, is that children who do sacrifice their own identities do have problems as they grow up, because clarity of identity is so important for confidence, and to do well in life. To me it is so fundamental for children to be able to understand who they are, and of course like all human beings we're all curious about where we've come from and where we are going.

The above demonstrates two anxieties which have informed the rationale behind Hiqmah School. Initially there was an underlying concern that Muslim children had not been performing well in education generally. However, there was also the anxiety that Muslim children might suffer socially in general if they were not educated about their identity. Acknowledgement of these underlying anxieties offered the fundamental rationale for a mainstream Muslim school and was the reason for the emphasis on educational provision. At Hiqmah School the foundations differed from those underlying ethos at Medina Primary, where the conviction was that a predominantly Islamic ethos would lead to a good education (head, Medina). A fundamental objective at Hiqmah School had always been specifically to provide a functional school set aside *for* Muslims. As a state funded Muslim school, V/A requirements have become an inherent part of this provision. The head's background as an educator, together with anxieties about her daughter's educational trajectory, had provided the basis for the educational aspect of ethos being a feature of the school throughout its history. Core objectives had always been for children to perform well academically and to address an 'uneven playing field' (head, Hiqmah School), as Muslim children were underperforming in non-Muslim schools. This has been demonstrated above in that staff composition had always represented a mix of Muslim and

non-Muslim teachers with the school having an all-qualified teaching staff at the time of acquiring state funding. Therefore at Hiqmah the Islamic environment facilitated educational opportunities for Muslim children. This was not the same process as that observed at Medina Primary where a predominantly Islamic ethos resulted in reaching educational objectives.

When delivering the curriculum in the classroom, there were consistencies with approaches used at Medina Primary. Lessons at Hiqmah also started with 'carpet time' where pupils would sit on a carpeted area of the floor, whilst the teacher explained to them what tasks they would be doing for the duration of the class. Teachers would also often set up question and answer sessions referred to as 'rapid recall' during carpet time where the teacher would ask the class a question and encourage children to offer answers by raising their hand. In addition, other tasks were also observed during 'carpet time' where teachers would set a task or problem on a small dry-wipe board and encourage children to come to the front and write a contribution on the board.

Lessons also required children to work on tasks at their tables, either by themselves or in groups. As with that observed at Medina, during practical lessons, noise levels would rise. However, there did not appear to be any uniform methods used by teachers to maintain order like those employed at Medina. Teachers would simply ask individuals to be quiet or address the class firmly. It is worth noting that noise levels during practical tasks was comparable to those experienced at Medina, although there were more instances where

children worked in almost complete silence at Hiqmah, particularly in the higher year groups.

Interestingly, whereas disorder within the classroom at Medina typically took the form of higher noise levels, at Hiqmah it took other forms. For example, during my second session of observation one boy in the year 2 class complained to the teacher that he had been struck by another pupil. Bullying, largely felt to be a rare occurrence at Medina Primary, seemed to be an issue that teachers were taking initiatives with. This was observed in the year 4 class where the teacher had a 'bully box' where children could post notes naming children that had offended them. The teacher emptied the box which had a single note inside, and asked two girls to stand up together on one side of him, and six more to stand on his other side facing each other. The teacher then acted as mediator, asking what had happened between the two groups. The first two girls had felt intimidated by the group of six. A conversation ensued where the teacher explained to the group of six why intimidation is not acceptable without directly accusing them. He then asked the first two girls if they felt better and they responded positively. All parties were then asked to shake hands and sit down. The teacher then said that the class could have an extra marble for their collection if the bully box was empty at the end of the following week.

This approach of offering marbles in return for desirable behaviour was also used in the year 5 class during carpet time. The teacher offered the group 5 marbles at the end of the week if she had no negative feedback from other staff concerning year 5 children. A more frequently used approach to disruption during lessons

were 'chart warnings'. These were typically given to individual pupils for repetitive disruption. On one occasion a boy in the year 3/4 class was given what would be his third chart warning for swinging his chair backward. Acquiring three chart warnings meant that the boy had to go to a 'mentoring area' to sit in silence for 10 minutes under the supervision of a staff member. Approaches to maintaining order whilst delivering the curriculum in the classroom at Hiqmah differed from those experienced at Medina.

However, as with Medina Primary the curriculum at Hiqmah School had similarly also undergone a process of Islamicisation. The processes of Islamicising the curriculum in each school were similar in some ways and different in others. The approach whereby Islamic input would be used to help to meet national curriculum objectives was consistent in both schools. As was also the case with Medina Primary, the teachers at Hiqmah School would refer to the *Qur'an* to support content in science lessons in a similar way to that described in the three schools in Berglund's study (Berglund 2009: 199). However the starting points in the process were seemingly different. Whereas the assistant head at Medina Primary referred to Islamic obligations as the starting point for Islamicising the curriculum, there seemed to be more emphasis on starting from an educational perspective at Hiqmah School. When asked how the national curriculum was integrated into Islamic provision the deputy head explained:

We have the basis of the national curriculum and what we do is we try and put an Islamic input into that. So we look at the topic and we see what Islamic input ...like [the] Earth, sun and moon, they could be looking at a Creator, God made them and so they might look at a [*Qur'anic*] verse which is related to that. So that's how we would integrate.

The process of integration itself would take the form of workshops where managerial and teaching staff would brainstorm ideas for including Islamic input when delivering the curriculum, culminating in usable plans. Although starting from an educational perspective there remained an emphasis on the importance of Islamic provision at Hiqmah although there was an apparent awareness of the duality of V/A requirements and Islamic objectives. The following exchange with the deputy head demonstrates the above analysis:

DB: Is the ethos of the school seen as an Islamic ethos which pervades the national curriculum or is it more of a 50-50 balance between national curriculum and a general Islamic environment? What is your view of that?

Deputy Head: My personal view is that both are very important. I mean the ethos Islamically for us is very important to our children and of course for them to achieve academically the national curriculum is really important as well. So the children need both really to develop into good citizens; so they need the morals that will support them by their faith and then they also need to achieve academically in life as well.

It is possible that the above observation is heavily influenced by the ways managerial staff *talked* about Islamicising the curriculum rather than representing any fundamental difference in each school's approach. However the deputy head's summary above seemingly reinforces the evidence that ethos comprises dual objectives centred around Islamic provision and V/A requirements at Hiqmah School. Underlying V/A requirements were illustrated when considering approaches to Islamicising the curriculum. The deputy head explained that national curriculum objectives were of central importance stating 'whatever the curriculum is you could adapt it as long as you achieve the objectives. [As regards] The resources - you could use anything'. The above suggests that V/A requirements were more likely the starting point for curriculum development at Hiqmah School, whereas at Medina Primary the

process was more that of a predominantly Islamic ethos informing the curriculum.

Although the starting points for curriculum development may lie in V/A requirements rather than the Islamic side of ethos at Hiqmah, teachers, as those who deliver curriculum content, described an easy union between national curriculum objectives and Islamic input in the classroom. The year 4 teacher argued that integrating religion into processes of meeting educational objectives represented a positive approach within the context of the Muslim school. He explained that he had an advantage in having read the *Qur'an* and thus had developed his own system to offer Islamic input on a list of curriculum topics.

He summarised:

They learn about science, but then they see what *Qur'an* says about a particular topic, things like pollution or the water cycle. In the *Qur'an* there are many places it mentions [that]... Within the staff as well, sometimes we have meetings and those who are more familiar with *Qur'an*, they can help [other teachers] and say “OK your topic is linked with that topic”, so I think it’s a great philosophy.

The year 4 teacher’s account above illustrates how drawing on personal experiences of Muslim staff members could inform their own approaches to Islamicising the curriculum. The year 5 teacher represented an example of how non-Muslim staff adopted an applied approach to Islamicising the curriculum. She explained that integrating Islamic input into the curriculum was a new experience for her, although the methods she employed reflected those of the year 4 teacher. Like the year 4 teacher, the year 5 teacher described that the process used by staff in integrating Islamic provision into the curriculum involved referring back to the *Qur'an* as a resource, often referring to stories or

citations. Although unfamiliar with the *Qur'an* and new to the approach of Islamicising the curriculum, the year 5 teacher indicated her keenness as a non-Muslim to contribute to the ethos of the school as a whole, and argued that Muslim children should feel comfortable with their religious identity in an environment where they were being taught the national curriculum.

RE and IQA

In addition to the Islamicisation of the curriculum RE (religious education) represented the direct way in which children were formally taught about their own faith and other faiths. In addition, IQA (Islamic, *Qur'anic* and Arabic) represented a forum for children to both learn their faith and learn *about* their faith in the context of historical tradition. Whereas RE represented a subject taught in classrooms by class teachers, IQA sessions were led by supplementary teachers and took place in small groups in open areas of the school and focused on teaching the *Qur'an* and *Qur'anic* Arabic. The scope of content for IQA at Hiqmah was largely consistent with that described by Berglund in relation to the 'IRE' (Islamic Religious Education) employed at the schools in her study (see Berglund 2009: 25-26, 61). It is worth noting that the consistency in the integrated characteristics of IQA and IRE may be due to all three of the schools in Berglund's study being state funded, as is Hiqmah. For a full discussion of Berglund's study of IRE see Chapter 2 pages 56-59. This subsection will discuss the format and content of RE before moving on to discuss the role of IQA lessons in the curriculum.

RE at Hiqmah School largely focused on delivering Islamic content throughout the year with a week set aside to focus on other faiths. It provided a mechanism for teaching children about their faith and the history of the Islamic tradition. Teaching about a faith and teaching a faith in a school with a distinctive religious character and an all-Muslim pupil intake is necessarily a complex and inter-related one. The head of teaching and learning summarised the overall approach to RE at Hiqmah:

Building up the faith is very important so that children learn the basics of their own faith and then, yes, they are able to relate to other faiths as well, that there aren't *only* Muslims around and there are people of other faiths around and you need to respect those as well. Therefore we have "religions around us week" where they go and visit other places of worship, they've been to a Synagogue, they've been to the Church across the road, a Hindu temple we've been to, so I feel it's important that they do get those experiences.

The head of teaching and learning continued to explain that RE was focused on understanding elements of the Islamic faith such as the five pillars of Islam, the life of the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.), the history of the faith including the lives of prophets and more general narratives rooted in the historical tradition of Islam. She also explained that the 'other faiths week' was a necessary RE requirement which the children found enjoyable particularly when it came to visiting places of worship. The content of RE week would include lessons focused on Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism, and included activities whereby children would work from activity books about each faith and make displays for the school following visits to places of worship. For example, my first session of observation at Hiqmah School was in a lesson about Hinduism in the year 6 class in which children were allocated books on the faith which were then used in both collective reading and small group work. Similarly, displays emulating stained

glass made from translucent coloured acetate were on display in several classroom windows following a trip to the local Church as part of the focus on Christianity. Each of the displays were labelled and dated so that children and visitors would know that they related to the 'other faiths week'.

Each year during 'other faiths' week children would be taught about the four faiths of Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism, and children would have a fieldtrip to one relevant place of worship each year. During the time of the research the focus had been on Christianity and therefore children had visited an Anglican Church. As part of the history of the Islamic tradition commonalities between Christianity and Islam had been highlighted and, reportedly, the vicar at the Church had been impressed with questions the children asked during the visit. However, necessarily, it was not always the case that the other faiths children were taught about had such a common and inter-related history with Islam. For example the deputy head recalled an RE week one previous year where the focus had been on Hinduism, and the children were to visit a Hindu temple. The deputy head explained the preparation process:

With Hinduism we had a [Hindu] gentleman come in to actually do an introduction to Hinduism. We had all of key stage 2 there and showed them pictures so they were prepared and ready for when they go, because it is a different experience [visiting] a Hindu temple to what you'd get in Christianity or Judaism or even Sikhism.

The deputy head continued to explain that once prepared the children were 'very interested' during the visit. The trip itself represented an enlightening experience for staff members as well as children. To quote the deputy head:

When you go in the first thing that hits you in a Hindu temple is the size of their different gods that they actually worship. And because they offer them food, that is quite an experience even for adults as well. And then

when they wake up the gods as well they ring the bells so it was an interesting experience.

Trips to places of worship represented an active approach. Whereas the Islamic studies content of RE represented a complex relationship between teaching about the Islamic tradition and teaching the faith itself, the 'other faiths week' necessarily required a different approach. The year 4 teacher explained that for him the emphasis during such RE lessons was to study relevant beliefs and practices in Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism with the aim that 'children know both sides of the picture'. This highlights a fundamental distinction whereby, even in relation to Islamic studies, RE was more geared towards teaching about religions and religious traditions whereas IQA was the primary mechanism for teaching the Islamic faith at Hiqmah School.

Although the teaching staff at Hiqmah School represented a near 50-50 mix of Muslims and non-Muslims, the specialist IQA teachers were all Muslims with a specialism in the *Qur'an*. The teachers were specifically assigned to IQA, and classes would be rotated during the day. Although the lesson itself was supplementary the staff were not peripatetic as they taught throughout the whole day. The timetable for IQA was for each group of children to have a daily 30 minute session in the IQA rooms, a number of which were located in a large hallway area comparable to an indoor courtyard at the centre of the school. Interviews with the deputy head and the head of teaching and learning revealed the content of the sessions as focusing on reciting appropriately and memorising the *Qur'an* with an emphasis on children understanding the underlying meaning behind recitations and also and learning Arabic as a language. Consistent with

narratives of *Qur'an* lessons at School A and School B there was also an emphasis on vocalisation and teaching children the correct intonation (referred to as *tajwid* by Nasira, see Chapter 4, page 129) when reciting. IQA sessions also focused on Arabic vocabulary independent of citations from the *Qur'an*. In teaching children how to read Arabic, to memorise citations from the *Qur'an* and their underlying meanings and how to recite aloud with the correct intonation the IQA sessions were focused on equipping children with skills required to explore their own faith. Aims and objectives then were for children to be able to read the *Qur'an* in Arabic, to understand the content and to correctly recite aloud in accordance with Islamic obligation. Although slightly different in their form and shorter sessions, the aims and objectives of IQA at Hiqmah School seem to be consistent with those of *Qur'an* lessons at Medina Primary. Thus, although there was an emphasis on V/A requirements to the extent that ethos overall represented a duality of Islamic and educational objectives, RE and IQA lessons demonstrate how the two were inter-related at Hiqmah School. IQA lessons in particular demonstrated another of the processes by which the school practised the Islamic part of its ethos.

Community relations

In Chapter 3 it was argued that ethos was comprised of inter-related elements in continuous interaction. It was also argued that the effect of ethos would be cyclical in nature where both outcomes and intentions comprised a distinct character. Accordingly, although the intentions, aims and objectives underlying ethos within the context of the school itself are of central significance, so too are

the influences on ethos brought in from outside the school. These broad elements are indeed interrelated and represent a constant cyclical organic process at both Medina and Hiqmah. The ways in which outside factors affect the school's ethos in a wider and more general sense will be discussed in this section (there is a related discussion above on the use of the school's Mosque by the wider community discussed in the subsection *Practices and values*).

Profile of staff

As discussed in the subsection *Infrastructure* the profile of staff at Hiqmah School had remained relatively constant over time. As an outside influence the profile of staff constitutes itself an important strand of ethos at the school. The presence of both Muslim and non-Muslim staff represented a celebrated characteristic of the school. When discussing the influence of non-Muslim staff the head of teaching and learning explained that the extent to which a given teacher would focus on delivering an Islamic content would remain their own personal choice. However, although there were no obligations beyond using basic etiquettes, non-Muslim teachers were encouraged if they showed an interest in broadening their contribution to the Islamic side of ethos. Although the modest dress code encouraged did not require non-Muslim women to wear the *hijab*, one such staff member did out of choice.

The year 5 teacher, herself a non-Muslim, explained the ways in which she aimed to promote the Islamic side of ethos at Hiqmah. Consistent with the convictions of management staff, her interpretation of the Islamic side of ethos was to promote 'love and peace, that's what we try and instil all the time'. She

continued, explaining that providing a good education would leave children with important lifelong skills, although for her providing an Islamic environment where children could comfortably indulge their faith represented an equally important part of ethos. Several of the non-Muslim teachers had religious backgrounds themselves including Hinduism and several strains of Christianity which may explain an overall commitment to the Islamic side of ethos. There was a consensus among all interviewees that non-Muslim staff members were keen to contribute Islamic content in relevant lessons and supported the Islamic side of the school's ethos. The year 4 teacher summarised: 'like any other religion, everybody says "do good deeds" whether you say it in an Islamic way or you say it in a Christian way it's all the same. So I'm sure [those] teachers are very happy.' There was also a strong conviction that the presence of non-Muslim teachers contributed an important role in children's personal and social development.

The influence of non-Muslim staff at Hiqmah was seen to make an important contribution to the ethos as a whole. Consistent with the school's objectives outlined above, that children have to go out into the wider world, the conviction was that the profile the staff as a mix of Muslims and non-Muslims helped prepare children for life after the school. The mixed profile of the staff represented an outside influence which played an important role in the school's ethos as it reflected the wider society children will be entering on leaving the school. Consistent with the definition of ethos in the methodology and discussions in relation to Medina Primary the above demonstrates the extent to which outside influences can have an important role in informing key aims and objectives in preparing children for life after Hiqmah.

Life after Hiqmah School

The dual strands of Islamic provision and V/A requirements manifested in the ethos of the school informed aims and objectives in relation to preparing children for life after Hiqmah. Parents also represented an important outside influence on the ethos, as a key objective for the schools was to meet their needs. Staff interpretations of parent's desires initially focused on the Islamic side of ethos offered by the school. The head of teaching and learning explained that for parents: 'education is very important obviously, but I think overriding that is the, we call it the feel, it's the manners, the Islamic element of it, the basic teachings of Islam, the religion, so the child will know the basics'. The year 4 teacher elaborated further explaining:

From a parent's point of view people are different, there are lots of Muslim children in the state schools, but the kind of parents we have they want their religion, the Islamic tradition to be a very important part of their children's life. That's why they've chosen the child to be in this school... I think it's a school by choice for parents, and there is a long list.

There was a collective perception then among staff that parents initially chose the school due to the Islamic side of ethos. However, consistent with the model of ethos overall, an emphasis on educational objectives informed the aims staff held in preparing children for life after Hiqmah School. The head described the aims, mission and vision statement of the school, explaining that children should be educated 'in a well rounded way' facilitated by the national curriculum. This would prepare children for life outside of the school where they need to be prepared for a society characterised by cultural and religious diversity whilst also developing the skills necessary to 'go on to university'. Educational skills then

represent a central focus in relation to what children will take away from the school. However, providing an Islamic environment within which to achieve educational objectives represents an equally important aim for the school in equipping children with the necessary skills to practice their own faith after life at Hiqmah School.

Intake and changes over time

The nature of the intake at Hiqmah had necessarily changed over time in relation to the school's transition to voluntary-aided status and required changes in admissions policies. In reference to the definition of ethos in Chapter 3 as interrelated elements in a continuous process, the profile of intake and any changes in prevalent characteristics of both children and staff over time are of significance for the ethos of the school as a whole. The changing nature of the intake of children over time represents one such element of ethos. According to the head of teaching and learning the school had from the outset attracted parents from districts or towns located several miles from the school, with a very small number of children travelling from a neighbouring city. Some of those families had continued to send their children to the school following the transition to voluntary-aided status, as siblings represented a priority group in state admissions policies. Over time, however, families from further afield dwindled as local families took priority under the new admissions system. The current intake largely reflected the composition of the Muslim community immediately surrounding the school with a majority of families of Pakistani descent, but also included Indian, Bangladeshi and Somali families (for a detailed discussion see Chapter 5 pages 175-176). The head explained that the initial transition from

independent to grant-maintained status had changed the profile of intake as the requirement for economic commitment had been removed.

The implications of this prospect in itself represented a key anxiety at Medina Primary. The conviction at Medina was that, whereas the requirement for fees in the independent sector resulted in interest from parents serious enough to make financial commitments regarding their children's education, the lack of fees in the voluntary-aided sector *might* result in attracting parents who would not have pursued an Islamic education for their children otherwise. The above argument is difficult to validate conclusively, although it is important to consider the underlying notion when considering the role intake can have on the ethos of the school. For example, it could be argued that serious parents from further field are actually excluded when their local independent school makes the transition to voluntary-aided status as necessary new admissions policies typically prioritise local families; a proportion of whom will have had no prior dealings with the school. This process of a necessarily changing intake in Muslim schools following the acquisition of state funding is consistent with the narratives of School A and School B (see Chapter 4) where it represented a key isomorphic change in infrastructure. Although Nasira's conviction was that the process had no significant implications for ethos the analysis and subsequent argument at the end of Chapter 4 demonstrates that such isomorphic changes in infrastructure *necessarily* affect ethos.

The above argument is difficult to validate. For example, when asked if waiting lists were full the deputy head at Hiqmah School responded:

They are. They [parents] want that Islamic input don't they? As an Islamic school the ethos is all around, they wouldn't get that if they were in another school... RE is Islamic RE, all the subjects from *fiqh*, *aqidah* (belief), *adab*, *sirah* (personal path, scholarship of the life of Prophet Mohammed)... I send my child here because I want him to have both worlds. I mean [Hiqmah] is a very good academic school as well so I send him here so he can have his Islamic knowledge and then he could have his academic, both.

Thus, although it was natural that the removal of fees would generate more interest and, as argued above, an increased interest on the part of parents who would not otherwise have considered financially committing to an Islamic education, the deputy head's convictions challenged the notion. Not only did she emphasise the Islamic content as the key point of interest for parents, but she also demonstrated this by having made the personal commitment of sending her own child to the school.

As with School A and School B, changes in admissions inherent to acquiring voluntary-aided status had implications for isomorphism for Hiqmah School. As argued earlier, Hiqmah School experienced processes of coercive isomorphism prior to entering the state sector. DiMaggio and Powell identify that cultural expectations in the society within which organisations function can be central for encouraging coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 67). Hiqmah fulfilled the requirement for fully qualified teaching staff whilst still in the independent sector, as so adopted a state of isomorphic resemblance to established voluntary-aided schools prior to acquiring state funding. However, acquiring grant-maintained, and later voluntary-aided status had implications for processes of mimetic isomorphism. As with Nasira's narratives, sustainability was a long term concern for the head at Hiqmah, although in contrast to School A and School B, immediate survival was not a central concern. Under Processes

of mimetic isomorphism, organisational models emerge in response to uncertainty, and unstable institutions may knowingly or unknowingly adopt these models in the pursuit of stability (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 69). Consistently with School A and School B, the pursuit of stability for Hiqmah School resulted in fundamental changes in intake resulting from mimetic isomorphism. Taking on the model of the state funded faith school led to fundamental changes in admissions policies and therefore the nature of intake and parental interest at Hiqmah School. Although these processes of change were a point of contention for the head, the above will have necessarily had implications for the school's ethos as a whole (as defined in Chapter 3), even if managerial objectives in terms of Islamic and educational provision have remained constant over time.

As argued earlier in the chapter, Hiqmah School experienced institutional isomorphism prior to acquiring state funding. As outlined in Chapter 2, Deephouse (1996) considers isomorphism to be 'the resemblance of a focal organisation to other organisations in its environment' (Deephouse 1996: 1024). From this position isomorphism can be seen to be a 'state' as well as a process of change. Initially, based on her previous experience, the head served as a conduit to transmit a particular model of schooling when founding Hiqmah through a process of mimetic isomorphism. Central to the model were an all qualified teaching staff and an education-centred focus and Islamic provision. These aims were successfully achieved and sustained whilst Hiqmah was still in the independent sector. In addition, the school had a history of employing both Muslim and non-Muslim staff whilst in the independent sector, which has been maintained throughout the school's transition into the state sector. These

constant factors were established prior to the school's acquiring grant-maintained status. Thus, as an independent school, Hiqmah was in a state of isomorphic resemblance with the Muslim schools which School A and School B would become in the V/A sector. Theories of institutional isomorphism will be applied to Hiqmah School, particularly regarding processes of change, in more detail in Chapter 8.

In contrast to Medina Primary, ethos at Hiqmah School embodied a duality of Islamic objectives and V/A requirements. These two main elements were not mutually exclusive of each other. However, the distinction between the two sets of objectives lies in the underlying motives in each instance. Analysis of the Islamic element of ethos at Hiqmah School revealed an emphasis on the importance of Arabic in everyday life, practices and values and the Islamicisation of the curriculum. Within this context promoting learning among children was motivated by the notion that the pursuit of knowledge is an Islamic obligation. By contrast, the necessary isomorphic prerequisites in infrastructure such as the fulfilment of the national curriculum; the requirement for qualified teaching staff; isomorphic changes in admissions and in the nature of parents and pupil intake over time can all be attributed to fulfilling V/A requirements necessary within the context of the state education system.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter will discuss the research findings and analysis in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 in relation to themes introduced in Chapter 2. New literature and contextual material which has become relevant in light of research findings will also be included to inform a discussion relevant for sociological, educational and general academic debate.

Informing the faith schools debate

The rationale for the original research for this thesis was that research carried out in Muslim schools in England and Wales is limited. In Chapter 2 it was argued that the debate has been of central importance for maintaining an academic focus on faith-schooling in the UK in the light of contemporary public/media attention. Muslim schools have been frequently at the centre of any public attention on faith schools, particularly in the media. A lack of published empirical qualitative studies carried out in Muslim schools leads to a problem in conceptualising the Muslim school (see Breen 2009b). Applying theories of institutional isomorphism to the research findings has revealed that any independent Muslim school awarded voluntary-aided status may well be unrecognisable following the transition (see Chapter 2 pages 23-26 for definitions of coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism). Chapter 2 concluded that the solution lies in making a conscious effort to inform the debate further by carrying out more qualitative research within both voluntary-aided and independent Muslim schools so that we know better the phenomenon which we are discussing (Breen 2009b: 112). In

Chapter 2 the above analysis constituted a rationale for qualitative research into Muslim schools as a means of informing the faith schools debate in the long term. The first half of this chapter will draw on the research findings as a means of informing the faith schools debate in relation to three key issues: stakeholders, community cohesion and the public/private spheres. Each context provides a useful mechanism for informing the debate with the research findings; and also raises key issues for discussing the ways in which institutional isomorphism affected the schools studied. Having established that voluntary-aided status resulted in demonstrable examples of institutional isomorphism in the voluntary-aided schools studied, the second half of the chapter will discuss research findings in relation to the material used to inform '*The rationale behind Islamic schools*' in Chapter 2. This will help to outline the similarities and distinctions between ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. The final subsection will summarise the substantive research findings, arguing that status as independent or voluntary-aided had a fundamental influence on ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School.

Stakeholders: parental interest

Predictions concerning parental interest, developed on reviewing relevant literature in Chapter 2, were reflected to some degree in the research findings. As an independent school, Medina Primary attracted parents from areas outside of the school's immediate surroundings, including families from as far afield as a neighbouring city. This trend, along with the requirement to pay fees, indicates a particular level of commitment from parents. Narratives of School A and School B and the case study of Hiqmah School all document processes of normative

isomorphism (tied to professional development), a central feature of which was changes in admissions policies. All three schools adopted policies prioritising siblings of children currently attending the school and families residing in close proximity to the school. As argued in Chapter 4 (in relation to School A and School B) and Chapter 7 (in relation to Hiqmah School), such isomorphic changes in infrastructure will have necessarily changed the character of school intake in each case. Commitment to ethos, reflected in the paying of fees and daily travelling of significant distances, becomes at risk of being displaced by convenience, proximity and circumstance.

Analysis of research findings from the ethnographic case studies indicates that the independent context bred interest from parents with a focus primarily on Islamic provision. General educational objectives were important, but the consensus that a strong Islamic provision will necessarily result in a good education was shared by staff and parents. Conversely, the voluntary-aided sector reflected themes more consistent with existing debates surrounding parental interest and faith schools generally. Parents chose Hiqmah School with a clear view to their children receiving a high standard of education. The Islamic part of ethos was of central importance. However, staff perceptions of parents at Hiqmah School indicate that educational considerations were held in high regard. This contrasts with the model of ethos and subsequent role of parental interest at Medina Primary described above. The nature of admissions policies and consequential trends for parental interest to focus on both educational and Islamic provision at Hiqmah School indicates the presence of V/A requirements, and reflects the overall duality of ethos at the school. Desires of parents in

relation to educational and Islamic provision feed into and inform the overall ethos of the school in each case. This is consistent with the definition of ethos in the methodology as comprising interrelated elements, including outside influences.

Stakeholders: human rights

As described above, parents represent an important stakeholder group for Muslim schools, particularly as they were seen to influence ethos at both Medina and Hiqmah. As documented above and in Chapters 4 and 7, parental interest and intake can change dramatically when Muslim schools acquire state funding. Considering European policy developments concerning human rights and religious education allows for a broader discussion of the implications of independent and voluntary-aided status for economic stakeholders. In recent years values of freedom of religion or belief and education for tolerance have been entrenched in Council of Europe (CoE) documents (Jackson 2008: 156). The council comprises 47 member states and aims include protecting human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law and seeking solutions to problems such as discrimination against minorities, xenophobia and intolerance (Council of Europe 2004a). The events of September 11th 2001 resulted in a shift in policy with intercultural and interfaith dialogue through education on the basis of shared principles of ethics and democratic citizenship becoming a key theme for the council (Jackson 2008:157).

The European Commission subsequently sponsored the ‘Religion in Education: A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of

European countries?’ (REDCo) project which aims to identify approaches and policies that can contribute to making religion in education a factor in promoting dialogue in the context of European development (Jackson 2008: 155). The underlying conviction is that knowledge and understanding of religion would be highly relevant to good community and personal relations and as such is a legitimate concern for public policy (Jackson 2008: 158).

European discussions about religion and education, and some policy recommendations, are partly based on the principle of freedom of religion or belief found in the human rights codes and related law (European Union 2009, UK Parliament 1998b [13]). Although most of these refer to teaching about religions and beliefs in publicly funded schools (Council of Europe 2008, OSCE 2007), their general approach, grounded in human rights is relevant to faith schools. Faith schools need to be seen both in light of the principle of freedom of religion or belief, and in relation to the responsibilities towards others in society that relate to the application of that principle. When contextualised by European policy initiatives issues concerning human rights extend beyond those of the immediate beneficiaries of faith-schooling such as pupils and parents. Considering European policy developments, and suggestions such as those outlined by Jackson in relation to the REDCo project, brings together the relevance for faith-schooling as a means of promoting dialogue in relation to a substantive human rights agenda.

Stakeholders: isomorphism and legitimacy

European developments are of relevance for situating Medina Primary and Hiqmah School in relation to issues concerning freedom of individual belief and social responsibility. Each school's status as either independent or voluntary-aided is relevant for discussing relevant stakeholders. Several issues can be raised concerning the position of each of the schools in relation to freedom of religion or belief and wider social responsibility. Each voluntary-aided school is funded up to 90% by local government authorities with 10% of funding coming from a relevant religious institution (DfES 2002 [4]). In the case of Hiqmah School this was a local Islamic trust which had ties to the school from its inception in the independent sector. The proportion of funding provided by the state necessarily brings the taxpayer into the category of economic stakeholder. For publicly funded faith schools, such as voluntary-aided schools in England and Wales, the issues of human rights extends beyond individual freedom of religion or belief for pupils and their parents, as the human rights of the taxpayer (and so wider society as a whole) need to be considered. Conversely, the nature of economic stakeholders in independent faith schools is such that issues of human rights more usefully apply to freedom of religion and belief than to concerns for wider social responsibility. Economic stakeholders in the independent context in England and Wales are confined to fee paying parents and those making charitable contributions. As such economic stakeholders are active in contrast to the passive position of the taxpayer.

An economic perspective then places voluntary-aided schools firmly in a position of social responsibility. Independent faith schools have far smaller numbers of

active stakeholders who will more likely be directly involved with the school beyond making economic contributions. In this respect issues of freedom of religion or belief are more relevant for independent faith schools when taking a purely economic perspective on the European context into consideration. The smallness of the number of active stakeholders at Medina diminishes the overall implications for a wider social responsibility from an economic viewpoint. This is another example of implications of institutional isomorphism for state funded Muslim schools. Not only have the state funded Muslim schools in this thesis taken on a pre-prescribed model of the voluntary-aided faith school (see Chapters 4, and 7), but they also have a newfound responsibility to a larger network of economic stakeholders.

The newfound responsibility means that the voluntary-aided Muslim school is under pressure to fight for legitimacy in the eyes of their newfound economic stakeholders. Legitimacy is a recurring theme in theories of institutional isomorphism. Deephouse (1996) argues that organisations that conform to the strategies used by other organisations are recognised by the general public as being more legitimate than those that deviate from normal behaviour (Deephouse 1996: 1033). For independent Muslim schools, legitimacy need only be won in the eyes of the small number of active stakeholders, namely parents and those making donations. For voluntary-aided Muslim schools, acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of large numbers of passive economic stakeholders requires processes of institutional isomorphism. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess how successful voluntary-aided Muslim schools are in winning legitimacy in the eyes of the taxpayer. However, among management staff at Hiqmah, School A and

School B, there was a feeling that acquiring voluntary-aided status meant a heightened responsibility to a broader stakeholder group. This is consistent with Dacin's (1997) suggestion that new organisations face particular concerns about legitimacy (Dacin 1997: 47).

Although this discussion is concerned with economic stakeholders and isomorphism, Tinker's (2006a, 2006b, 2009) research into stakeholder groups demonstrates that concerns about legitimacy are rooted in reality for Muslim schools. Tinker interviewed representatives of four key stakeholder groups: politicians from leading political parties; representatives of Muslim, Christian and secular/humanist organisations; head teachers at Muslim and non-Muslim schools, both state funded and independent; and Muslim parents who send their children to the various schools identified in the penultimate group (Tinker 2006a: 76-77). Particularly, her account of representatives of secular/humanist organisations and their critical concerns about state funding for Muslim schools illustrates that legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders is a particularly relevant issue for Muslim schools. According to Tinker, representatives of secular/humanist organisations questioned whether Muslim schools prepared children for life in a culturally diverse society (Tinker 2006a: 171). In addition, they argued that faith based schools were effectively ethnically segregated schools which would isolate communities, creating ghettos (Tinker 2006a: 173).

Tinker counters these arguments, stating that the geographical segregation of Britain's Muslim communities results from numerous factors including housing policy and immigration patterns (Tinker 2006a: 172). However, her account of

concerns held among representatives of secular/humanist organisations indicate that there is a tension between critics of Muslim schools, and the schools themselves fighting for legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders. This tension is undoubtedly amplified for voluntary-aided Muslim schools which have a responsibility to large numbers of passive economic stakeholders. Tinker points out that it is important to remember that Muslims also pay taxes, and that Muslim parents argued that they should receive the same benefits as many other taxpayers, including free faith-schooling (Tinker 2006a: 115).

In addition to having concerns about legitimacy in relation to stakeholders, School A, School B and Hiqmah all underwent observable normative isomorphism inherently tied to developing legitimacy through professionalisation. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organisations which exist in highly elaborated institutional environments, and succeed in becoming isomorphic with these environments gain the legitimacy and resources needed to survive (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 352). The processes of normative isomorphism which occurred at School A, School B and Hiqmah School on acquiring voluntary-aided status certainly demonstrate Meyer and Rowan's conviction. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) normative isomorphism stems primarily from professionalisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 71). Professionalisation as defined by DiMaggio and Powell as the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). The filtering of personnel also encourages normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:

152). Structural homogenisation encourages the flow of personnel with common career titles (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152).

Within the case of Muslim voluntary-aided schools, ‘teacher’ comes to mean ‘staff with formal teaching qualifications’ (QTS, PGCE). As documented in Chapter 4, acquiring voluntary-aided status resulted in an overhaul of staff at School A and School B where unqualified teachers were replaced with qualified teaching staff. This single process demonstrates a double edged impact of normative isomorphism at School A and School B. Taking on voluntary-aided status required professionalisation through appointing qualified staff. In exchange for fulfilling this professional requirement the school was rewarded with voluntary-aided status, and therefore legitimacy as a state funded faith school.

Although Hiqmah employed an all-qualified teaching staff prior to acquiring state funding, the school also experienced processes of normative isomorphism in relation to legitimacy. As documented in Chapter 7, acquiring state funding led to increased access to educational resources at Hiqmah School. This was observed in the classrooms, all of which had a ceiling mounted projector, the same globe, a uniform set of three maps and a uniform poster depicting musical instruments. It is argued in Chapter 7 that the standardisation of resources following Hiqmah’s transition into the state sector represents a process of professionalisation. One important aspect of professionalisation is the growth and elaboration of networks which span organisations, and across which models diffuse rapidly (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). Through processes of

normative isomorphism, a particular model of the voluntary-aided Muslim school may have been diffused to Hiqmah through increased access to standardised resources. DiMaggio and Powell argue that professionalisation is as much assigned by the state as it is created by the activities of the professions (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 71). Furthermore, in her research on stakeholder groups, Tinker found that increased state control was seen as an advantage of state funding by some politicians (Tinker 2006a: 148). Drawing on the above it is argued here that increased access to resources represented one way in which a model of the legitimate voluntary-aided Muslim school was assigned to Hiqmah through voluntary-aided status.

Community cohesion objectives

In light of the stakeholders debate, and issues of separating children by faith discussed in Chapter 2, the implications of faith-schooling for community cohesion become of relevance. The first specific guidelines concerning community cohesion in schools were published by the Home Office in 2004 setting out four strategic aims for schools (Home Office 2004: 5-6). The aims were:

- Closing the attainment gap;
- Developing common values of citizenship;
- Contributing to good community relations and challenging discrimination and inequality;
- Removing barriers (Home Office 2004: 5-6).

The above represents the first steps in addressing the 2004 Cantle Report recommendation that community cohesion should become part of OFSTED's

inspection process (Miller 2009: 14). The 'duty to promote community cohesion' formed part of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, 21 (5), and non-statutory guidelines were introduced in 2007 with inspections to begin in September 2008 (DCFS 2007a). In relation to the time frame of the research the duty to report on cohesion was not implemented until after the data collection process had been completed.

I have already noted the argument that faith-based schools are inherently erosive of community cohesion. However, evidence from the research shows various ways in which such schools can make a very positive contribution to community cohesion. For example, with specific reference to the OFSTED duty to report on community cohesion, Nasira argued that in her experience Muslim schools had been active in promoting cohesion due to a heightened sense of awareness about the 'job to be done'. Beyond the exclusive narratives of School A and School B, Nasira recounted that all of the Muslim schools she had been affiliated with had demonstrated a desire to 'be part of a larger community' and had been active in promoting community cohesion. Specifically in relation to School A and School B, both schools had been associated with other schools of other or no religious character in relation to community activities which had included inviting both Muslim and non-Muslim members of the wider community into the school. For Nasira the overall aim was 'blurring the edge of the community with the school' without compromising on the Islamic provision which took place inside the schools. She summarised as follows: 'you can be very, very strong in your own belief but be part of a much bigger whole'.

On the surface, initiatives which would be consistent with promoting community cohesion at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School were also present and comparable. For Medina Primary, a 'community week' was arranged at the concluding stages of fieldwork at the school. During the week the school was open to the public and members of the surrounding community were encouraged to visit. Events were also organised for the children such as talks from the police, and presenting a cheque for the local NHS hospital following a fundraising event involving adults in mascot costumes for children's entertainment. Certificates and awards were on display throughout Hiqmah School indicating that they had taken similar initiatives, although more directly involving other schools. In addition, Hiqmah School had arranged trips to various places of worship as part of learning about other faiths in their 'RE week'. However, the distinctions in ethos between the two schools were reflected in the ways in which they met community cohesion objectives. For example, the assistant head at Medina Primary summarised the influence she felt the varied intake had:

There is no racial bullying, children don't ascribe themselves to a culture they just see themselves as being Muslims. We don't really push it but we just seem to attract that kind of intake and that kind of staff, those kinds of parents. It definitely contributes to creating a harmonious environment. It means we [develop relations] with a variety of different Islamic groups or Mosques... because of our intake we do engage with other settings.

Consistent with the trips to places of worship at Hiqmah School, trips based on curriculum topics were being arranged as fieldwork concluded at Medina Primary. Year 3 were to visit a museum housing ancient Roman ruins as part of a history trip, and year 6 were to visit a different museum as part of a science

topic on habitats. The assistant head at Medina Primary explained that trips would be an effective way of 'getting Muslim schools or Muslim pupils out there in the society or the community because it has a two pronged objective. One is for children to learn in an out of school environment; secondly for us to be presented to the wider community, and hopefully the ethos of the school goes with the trip'. The head's insistence on the school attending a field trip where a *nashid* artist would be performing and having children from Medina set an example through singing without musical accompaniment also demonstrates willingness for the school to be presented to the wider community.

As stated earlier, the trips to places of worship arranged by Hiqmah School took place during an allocated 'RE week' where the curriculum focused on faiths other than Islam. The deputy head explained that RE was Islamic RE throughout the school year, with the exception being one 'religions around us week' which focused on other faiths. The most recent 'RE week' had RE classes focusing on Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism. In a previous year, children at key stage two had visited a Hindu temple. The deputy head felt that visiting a Hindu temple had been a particularly rewarding experience for the children, as they learnt that statues were important for the temple as a place of worship. Initiatives to take children out of the school were present at both Hiqmah School and Medina Primary and can be seen to house objectives consistent with community cohesion. Specifically, approaches to cohesion at both schools demonstrated attempts at addressing objectives of 'contributing to good community relations and challenging discrimination and inequality' and 'removing barriers' (Home Office 2004: 5-6).

Initiatives at both schools demonstrated attempts at addressing community cohesion objectives. At Hiqmah School RE was focused on the religious character of the school all year round, with the requirement to spend only one week teaching about other faiths. School trips were arranged at Medina Primary without the same level of obligation to do so inherently tied to the school's status. However, processes of coercive isomorphism, experienced as informal pressures and expectations at both schools, may explain why trips arranged at Medina and Hiqmah took similar forms.

Although sharing the format of school trips, in the wider context both schools can be seen to demonstrate diversity and or consistencies with community cohesion objectives in differing ways. Medina represented an ethnically diverse school in terms of staff and intake situated in the centre of a large ethnic and religiously diverse community (see Chapter 5 pages 157-158). Although the staff at Hiqmah School were less ethnically diverse, the appointment of non-Muslim staff resulted in a similar level of ethnic diversity to that at Medina Primary, although the school's intake remained comparatively mono-cultural. Tinker (2006a, 2006b) documents that Muslims in Britain are erroneously perceived as a homogenous group, predominantly comprising settled Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrant communities (Tinker 2006a: 117). Within her research, critics used this assumption to argue that faith schools were effectively monocultural (Tinker 2006b: 15), and Muslim schools in particular were accused of contributing to the isolation of communities (Tinker 2006a: 172). Tinker illustrates that Muslim schools are not necessarily monocultural,

arguing that the intake at Islamia Primary School in 2003 contained pupils of 23 different nationalities (Tinker 2006b: 15). In addition, my own research findings concerning intake at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School support Tinker's argument, demonstrating that Muslim schools can have diverse intakes. Furthermore, Muslim parents interviewed by Tinker placed great importance on the cultural diversity that can be found in Muslim schools, arguing that they were keen for their children to mix with Muslims from various backgrounds (Tinker 2006a: 118).

In addition to the ethnic and cultural diversity present in the schools, both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School held the conviction that their approaches to Islamic education would help pupils to function in wider society. This is consistent with Berglund's account of IRE being viewed as a subject which guided pupils into Islam by offering 'connectedness' to Swedish society whilst showing them the best possible way that they can live their lives as Muslims (Berglund 2009: 200). Furthermore the above can be seen to embody Hanson's (2001) argument that the objective of Islamic education is 'to create an ethical, moral, spiritual being who is multi-dimensional and who has a direction that is positive and healthy' (Hanson 2001: 14). At Medina Primary the conviction was that an emphasis on promoting 'Islam as a lived way of life' (see Hussain 2004: 322) would help children develop confidence in their identity and make them comfortable as practising Muslims in the wider community. Hiqmah School shared a similar conviction that the school's ethos would provide confident Muslims who were comfortable in their religious identity. However, the method differed somewhat at Hiqmah School as the presence of non-Muslim staff and

the exposure of children to different backgrounds *within* the school was seen as equally important in preparing them for life in the wider community.

Primary objectives and primary means

In short the *primary objectives* at Medina and Hiqmah were similar. However, the *primary means* of achieving those objectives represented opposing strategies. At Hiqmah School there was a strong conviction that a variety of influences from outside and within the school would be healthy for children. Their conviction was that the mix of both Muslim and non-Muslim staff was healthy for children as they would come into contact with and be influenced by non-Muslims in preparation for life in wider society. In addition, the duality of ethos at Hiqmah School could be seen to facilitate this aim further. Whilst constantly in the context of an Islamic environment children are simultaneously subjected to the wider influences of V/A requirements such as standardised educational resources and non-Muslim staff members. The conviction at Hiqmah was that the school's environment, conceptualised here as the duality model of ethos, would breed confident young Muslims who were comfortable and knowledgeable about their religious identity and immediately adaptable to wider society. Medina Primary held the same primary objectives as Hiqmah School: to produce confident young Muslims who would prosper in wider society. This view was also held by those in support of Muslim schools in Tinker's research (Tinker 2006a: 116). However, the primary means of achieving those objectives at Medina and Hiqmah were different.

For Medina Primary the conviction was that an all-Muslim staff and a predominantly Islamic ethos, consistent with living Islam as a 'way of life' (see Hussain 2004: 322), would produce confident young Muslims. Of principal importance here was the concept of staff and children 'allowing the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship' (Halstead 2004: 523). It was through this conviction that Medina aimed to create an ethical, moral, spiritual being who is multi-dimensional and who has a direction that is positive and healthy (Hanson 2001: 14).

As described in Chapter 7, although Medina Primary was a school, the feeling from management staff was that it was primarily an Islamic institution. The emphasis consistently lay on providing an Islamic environment within which children could develop their religious identity. Educational responsibilities were of importance to staff and parents; however analysis indicates that emphasis primarily lay on Medina Primary representing an Islamic institution. Focusing on the Islamic provision provided a model for fulfilling curriculum objectives as the pursuit of knowledge is an Islamic obligation (Dangor 2005: 520). The conviction held by the head teacher that a good education would follow from providing a strong Islamic ethos encapsulated the above approach. For Hiqmah School the duality model of ethos comprising Islamic provision and V/A requirements was the most effective approach to meeting the school's primary objective as outlined above. Medina Primary held a similar aim holding the conviction that rich Islamicisation of all aspects of school life would produce children who are incredibly aware of their faith in-depth and detail and thus

confident with their own Islamic identity. The primary objective of staff at Medina Primary was that pupils would be more comfortable in their own identity and a positive by-product of this was that they would be more confident and fruitful in wider society. Supporters of Muslim schools in Tinker's study demonstrated a similar conviction, arguing that being educated alongside other Muslims gives children confidence in their particularised identity, enabling them to interact more effectively with wider society (Tinker 2006a: 121). Of significance here is that Islamicisation as a means of making the child confident was the *primary objective* at Medina Primary, with adaptability to wider society representing a positive by-product. At Hiqmah School the *primary objective* was the end in itself of preparing Muslim children for the wider world.

Public/private spheres

As discussed in Chapter 2 the distinction between the public/secular and private/religious spheres is of central importance when considering the Islamic perspective (Hussain 2004: 322). Building on the discussion above concerning stakeholders and community cohesion initiatives, discussing Medina Primary and Hiqmah School in relation to the context of public and private spheres allows for a useful analysis of the position of the schools in relation to the state. In Chapter 2 a key issue for the rationale behind Muslim schools was the notion that Muslims should not have to 'switch off' their faith on entering the public sphere. As a solution Muslim schools provide an environment within which children can learn whilst fulfilling Islamic obligations and developing their religious identity. Situating these schools in relation to the public/private sphere is of importance for contextualising the research findings. Habermas's (2006) work on the

theoretical distinctions between and characteristics of public/private spheres (as referred to in Chapter 2) is of key importance for this discussion. Jackson (2008) applies Habermas' theoretical conclusions to positioning faith schools within the European context. As outlined in Chapter 2, Habermas identifies two kinds of public sphere. The *formal* public/political sphere is an appropriate arena for formal institutions such as parliaments, courts and ministries (Habermas 2006: 9). Existing alongside the *formal* public/political sphere, the *informal* public/political sphere is held to be an appropriate setting for communication between religious and non-religious individuals (Habermas 2006: 11).

Having identified the formal and informal public/political spheres, Habermas maintains that, while political institutions should remain neutral with regard to religion, at the level of discourse between secular and religious citizens (and between citizens of different religious persuasions), religious language and arguments should be encouraged (Habermas 2006: 10). According to Jackson's interpretation of Habermas' argument, understanding is developed through communication or dialogue. As such, responsibility lies with individuals with religious convictions to explain their language and the values associated with it to others through dialogue within the informal public/political sphere (Jackson 2008: 166). Subsequently 'secular' people can learn something about values *from* religious people, while some religious people might learn to re-express their language more meaningfully (Jackson 2008: 166).

Jackson concludes that Habermas's argument presents a theoretical case that is consistent with the policy shifts that have taken place in inter-governmental

institutions in the European context, and offers pointers towards the types of procedure and pedagogy that would operationalise their policy initiatives (Jackson 2008: 167). Further to the above Jackson argues that the publicly funded school is a microcosm of the informal public/political sphere and as such is an entirely appropriate setting for education about religions to take place (Jackson 2008: 166-167). Habermas's argument suggests that citizens from different backgrounds should interact with, listen to and engage with one another's positions in developing understanding and participating in the democratic process (Jackson 2008: 167). If the publicly funded school is a microcosm of the informal public/political sphere, there is a need for arrangements within the school that promote this mode of communication (Jackson 2008: 167). According to Jackson these would include ethos and view of relationships within the school and with outsiders (especially its attitudes to social diversity) and its pedagogical approaches. Both procedures and pedagogies need to foster communication between those from different backgrounds (Jackson 2008: 167).

In my view Jackson's application of Habermas to the European context leads to the theoretical conclusion that Hiqmah, as a publicly funded school, is indeed part of the informal public/political sphere. Hiqmah's status as a voluntary-aided school thus implies a responsibility to engage in dialogue around issues of religion within the informal public/political sphere. I would argue further that voluntary-aided schools with a distinctive ethos, such as Hiqmah School, would provide an important point of reference for non-religious individuals and individuals of different religious persuasions in the pursuit of dialogue. In this

respect the position of Hiqmah School in relation to economic stakeholders and social responsibility become resolved as the school is implicitly part of an existing public arena within which learning *from* religious individuals is appropriate.

Thus Hiqmah School is part of a wider network within which dialogue can be pursued as a result of its voluntary-aided status. Responsibility for the effectiveness of this network in relation to developing dialogue is subject to the degree to which policy recommendations from European bodies such as the Council of Europe are applied by national governments, or are used creatively by practitioners. However, European policy initiatives have developed to encourage processes of coercive isomorphism where publicly funded schools, such as Hiqmah, are obliged to contribute to dialogue as part of the responsibility of being in the informal public/political sphere.

Furthermore, as an independent school free of public funding, and thus subject to less government regulation, Medina Primary is not distinctly part of the informal public/political sphere in the same way that Hiqmah School is. However as the appropriate arena for discussions about religions, there is space for independent Muslim schools to contribute to the development of dialogue in the informal public/political spheres, though under no obligation. As a publicly funded school Hiqmah, by default, is part of a wider network which can be used to develop dialogue. The discussion above concerning approaches to community cohesion demonstrates ways in which Hiqmah is already active in promoting dialogue in this way. The extent to which isomorphic pressures from policy impact on

cohesion initiatives could in itself constitute the focus of further research, and is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Nevertheless, initiatives seemingly consistent with promoting dialogue in line with Jackson's analysis of Habermas are in place at Hiqmah School. As an independent school, Medina Primary lacks the implicit level of access to a wider network of publicly funded schools afforded at Hiqmah as a voluntary-aided school. Medina Primary is also less obliged to engage the informal public/political sphere in the way Hiqmah School has. As noted above, pressures of coercive isomorphism may also have encouraged cohesion initiatives at Medina Primary, even though the school exists outside of the networks that Hiqmah is connected to. One might speculate that any engagement would be more active in nature, consistent with the characteristics of the school's stakeholders. It is worth noting that the comparable nature of approaches to community cohesion at both schools discussed above implies that Medina Primary has been active to some extent in engaging with the informal public/political sphere.

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that Muslim schools are situated in an appropriate arena for discussions about religions. In relation to economic stakeholders, independent Muslim schools need only to win legitimacy in the eyes of their small numbers of localised active stakeholders. Consistent with this they are not clearly part of the informal public/political sphere, although contributions to the development of dialogue within the arena are possible, and independent Muslim schools may also feel isomorphic pressures to be active

within this context. Independent schools have limited access to the public/political network of publicly funded social institutions and so will have to be active in order to promote dialogue. Voluntary-aided Muslim schools, firmly part of the informal public/political sphere, represent valuable cultural points of reference in the discourse between religious and non-religious individuals. Nevertheless, their position as publicly funded means that they are under pressure to win legitimacy in the eyes of a much larger group of passive economic stakeholders. Being in the informal public/political sphere thus results in coercive isomorphism through formal and informal pressures and expectations.

Revisiting the rationale behind Muslim schools

Having taken into consideration wider contextual debates, this section will relate literature concerning Muslim schools discussed in Chapter 2 to the substantive thesis findings. This section will revisit the rationale behind Muslim schools drawing on the research findings and addressing consistencies and contrasts in the research and relevant material in Chapter 2.

Revisiting definitions of Islamic education

The theoretical basis for establishing the rationale behind Muslim schools lay in definitions of Islamic education. However, it is important to consider how theoretical explanations in Chapter 2 may have been realised or contested in the field. Halstead's (2004) detailed list of objectives underlying Islamic education

was realised to varying degrees in all of the schools researched for this thesis. According to Halstead, from an Islamic perspective ‘goodness’ in humans lies in the willingness to:

- a) Accept obligations of divine stewardship;
- b) Seek to take on divine attributes of wisdom (Halstead uses the term ‘*hikira*’ rather than *hiqmah*) and justice (‘*adl*’) which have been clarified through divine revelation;
- c) Strive for balanced growth of integrated personality, made up of Heart, spirit, intellect, feelings & the bodily senses;
- d) Develop their potential to become *insan kamil* (the perfect human being).
- e) Allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship (Halstead 2004: 523).

In relation to the above strong convictions were held among management staff at Medina Primary, Hiqmah School, School A and School B consistent with accepting obligations of divine stewardship (point ‘b’ above). The aim to take on the divine attribute of wisdom was most clearly manifested in the conviction held at Medina Primary that emphasising a predominantly Islamic ethos would necessarily result in providing a good education. As argued in Chapter 7 and above, Medina Primary most clearly represented an Islamic institution which happened to be a school and thus fulfilled an educational responsibility toward children. From this perspective, Medina represented the clearest example of promoting the pursuit of the divine attribute of wisdom from a position where educational responsibility is evidently informed by

Islamic obligation. Within this context it is reasonable to conclude that the above indicates a conviction at Medina that the pursuit of wisdom has been clarified through divine revelation.

It is important to make clear that interviews at Hiqmah School, School A and School B all indicated the conviction that the pursuit of knowledge, and therefore wisdom, represented an Islamic obligation. Furthermore, Islamic content such as IQA (Islamic Studies, *Qur'an* and Arabic) and *Qur'an* classes in all of the schools would have been focused on the process of revelation owing to the nature of the *Qur'an* being revealed to Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.) as the word of God. Thus all of the schools researched in the thesis fulfilled the second of the objectives outlined by Halstead to some degree. However, at Medina Primary the conviction that a predominantly Islamic ethos results in a good education indicates that the pursuit of wisdom as clarified by divine revelation permeated *all* aspects of the school. The thesis findings did not reveal anything indicative of explicit approaches to concepts of 'justice' in any of the schools in the study.

The search for balanced growth of integrated personality, made up of heart, spirit, intellect, feelings & the bodily senses (point 'c' above), is reflected in the analysis of the *primary objectives* and *primary means* of reaching objectives at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Integral to this is the fourth objective for Islamic education outlined by Halstead: d) [to] develop their [children's/learners'] potential to become the perfect human being (Halstead 2004: 523). The emphasis on Islamic provision in all of the schools

that took part in the research indicates a commitment to fulfilling Islamic obligations. Staff perceptions were that the integration of provision for Islamic obligations into the school day was important for both children and parents. However, provision for prayer in their working environment was of particular significance for staff at both Medina and Hiqmah. As practices are integrated into the faith in the Islamic perspective (*Qur'an* teacher, Medina Primary), provision for obligatory practices at Medina and Hiqmah can be seen as representative of an overall aim to develop the potential of both staff and children in becoming 'insan kamil' (perfect human beings).

The final objective as outlined by Halstead, to allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles (point 'e' above), was more visible at Medina Primary than the voluntary-aided schools. The all Muslim staff, perception of freedoms afforded in the independent sector and the conviction that a good education will necessarily follow a predominantly Islamic ethos facilitated Halstead's final objective in a constant process demonstrated in practice. However, within the context of the necessary infrastructure for voluntary-aided status, School A and School B, along with Hiqmah School all fulfilled Halstead's final objective. The case study at Hiqmah revealed that the endeavour to embody Islamic principles in all aspects of everyday school life represented a fundamental aspect of the Islamic part of ethos. Furthermore, although the duality model represented two distinct parallel elements of ethos, each could inform the other. For example, just as Hiqmah School fundamentally represented an educational institution aiming to offer Islamic provision, Islamic principles also informed all aspects of school life.

This is consistent with the argument that there should be no secular/spiritual divide in Muslim practice (Hussain 2004: 322). Although a more visible phenomenon at Medina Primary, all of the schools in the research demonstrated Islamic principles as set out by Halstead. Embodying these principles, either through a predominantly Islamic ethos or the duality model, ultimately demonstrated a conviction that divine guidance is needed for all three aspects of a human's life: mind, body and soul (Hussain 2004: 319).

Dangor's arguments concerning the implications of a dichotomy between Western and Islamic epistemologies were discussed in Chapter 2. According to Dangor, education in the West is concerned with pupil-centred outcomes in the marketplace rather than moral and spiritual development, whereas Islamic education is about being aware of God, not serving material needs (Dangor 2005: 522). Dangor's distinction between Western and Islamic epistemologies was highlighted as problematic in Chapter 2, although a perception of this distinction was realised in the comparative case study of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School. Furthermore, Dangor's distinction between Western and Islamic epistemologies might be realised/reflected in the duality model of ethos at Hiqmah School. As part of the state system staff at the school aim to meet the requirements of both sets of epistemological convictions, whereas Medina Primary can be seen to have subscribed almost entirely to an Islamic epistemology. The implications of applying Dangor's argument to the research findings are twofold. Critics would argue that the duality model results in a limited capacity to provide for Islamic needs. Conversely, the duality model can be seen as an antidote to Dangor's concerns about the dichotomy between

Western and Islamic epistemologies. The Islamic provision and V/A requirements could be seen to occupy the same space through the duality model at Hiqmah, with staff perceptions firmly asserting that the two worked in unison.

Revisiting existing research on Muslim schools

Of key importance for both Medina and Hiqmah was the integration of Islamic input into the curriculum. This process of Islamicisation was present, albeit to differing degrees, in both schools in the case study and also in the narratives of School A and School B. Dangor's (2005) discussion surrounding what he refers to as the *Islamization* of the curriculum becomes of relevance in light of thesis findings. His fundamental argument is that there *are* two systems of thought represented by the Western and Islamic worldviews. This distinction is problematic for Muslim scholars as the epistemologies of the natural and social sciences are empirical in nature, whereas within the Islamic worldview knowledge is divinely revealed (Dangor 2005: 527). Furthermore, Dangor argues that the empiricist and positivist tradition of the natural and social sciences has established itself in Muslim societies.

It is important to note here that although similar, Islamization and Islamicisation are distinct concepts. Common ground between the two was demonstrated in the research with the delivery of *Qur'an*/IQA lessons, through recitation and the emphasis on referring back to the *Qur'an* in order to explain content in lessons such as science. Islamicisation, however, also referred to more simple processes such as using Islamic names in maths

problems. This process has consistencies with the ‘Islamisation project’ as discussed by Niehaus (2009). Niehaus draws on a two-stage research project on Muslim schools in the Netherlands and the UK. Interviews with stakeholders were carried out at the first stage, and questionnaires were distributed to students in Muslim schools aged 15-17 in both countries at the second stage (Niehaus 2009: 114). She refers to findings from one Muslim school in the UK, identifying that ‘Islamisation’ took the form of following the national curriculum whilst ‘adding on Islamic or Muslim references’ (Niehaus 2009: 115). Niehaus gives an example where the roles and behaviour of characters from *Romeo and Juliet* would be discussed from an Islamic perspective (Niehaus 2009: 115). However, the head of the same school (it is not specified whether the school is independent or voluntary aided) reported that Islamisation of the curriculum had no role in curriculum development at the school, concluding that the Islamisation of science was not necessary because ‘all knowledge comes from *Allah*’ (Niehaus 2009: 115). Niehaus concludes that most of the UK Muslim schools made references to the *Qur’an*, Islamic culture or history in all subjects, and in some instances Muslim authors and Islamic countries were referred to in order to reflect the cultural and religious backgrounds of the children (Niehaus 2009: 115).

By contrast, Dangor’s concept of Islamization refers to a distinct process which requires revisiting Islamic heritage and the development of a new epistemology, paradigm of knowledge and methodology (Dangor 2005: 526). In conclusion, Dangor argues that for the foreseeable future the Islamization of knowledge will remain largely an individual enterprise, although the

introduction of 'Islamized syllabi' is likely to occur in independent schools in the West (Dangor 2005: 529). Consistent with the above prediction, the Islamicisation of the curriculum at *both* Medina and Hiqmah can be seen to embody Dangor's broader concept of 'Islamization' beyond the independent school.

Some of the schools where research was carried out for thesis have been named in literature referenced in Chapter 2. In line with the ethical assurances made during negotiating access, those schools will not be identified. However, this makes it difficult to make connections between my research findings and such literature. False consistencies could arise from comparing one school under a pseudonym in my research to the same school named in literature. Of the qualitative studies carried out within Muslim schools discussed in Chapter 2, those offered by Berglund (2009) and Bone (2009) are most relevant because of methodological consistencies with the research carried out for this thesis. Specifically, these consistencies include: carrying out ethnographic fieldwork over an extended period of time (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1) *inside* Muslim schools, employing qualitative data collection methods and using pseudonyms. Processes of Islamicisation at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School, as described above, were consistent with Berglund's accounts of the three Muslim schools in her study. Although present to differing extents, curriculum content at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School, and also School A and School B, was often related back to content from the *Qur'an*. This process was also present at 'al-Furat' in Berglund's study where content from the *Qur'an*, was used to support theories of modern science such as the 'big bang'

(Berglund 2009: 199). Approaches to teaching the *Qur'an* at al-Furat in Berglund's study were also consistent with the *Qur'an* lessons at Medina where emphasis was placed on understanding the meaning behind recitations (see Chapter 6, pages 198-200).

Interviews indicate that IQA lessons at Hiqmah also emphasised understanding the meaning behind content from the *Qur'an*. However restrictions in negotiating access made it impossible to conduct observation in those classes. Observation data from Medina Primary illustrated an approach similar to that described by Berglund at al-Furat where time was taken to ensure that children understood lesson content (Berglund 2009: 198). As the only source of data concerning IQA lessons at Hiqmah was interviews, it is difficult to establish whether children understanding the meaning behind recitations took priority over time taken in lessons, as was the case with Medina Primary.

Consistent with Bone's findings at 'al-Noor' (Bone 2009: 140), there was no significant teaching about other faiths at Medina Primary. The 'RE' week employed at Hiqmah School and School A and School B did offer some provision for the teaching of other faiths, particularly through visits to places of worship. Although there were no explicit lessons dedicated to teaching about other faiths at Medina Primary, Islamic studies lessons frequently referred to Christianity and Judaism as points of reference. In addition it is worth considering that approaches to community cohesion at Medina Primary were comparable to those at Hiqmah School.

Of central importance for ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School were common *primary objectives* and opposed *primary means* of achieving those objectives. Berglund's analysis revealed that primary objectives at all three schools in her study lay in 'connecting pupils to both the common Islamic tradition and the Swedish society in which their knowledge of Islam will be practised and applied' (Berglund 2009: 202). As with Berglund's account, the primary objectives at both Medina Primary and Hiqmah School were consistent in their aim to produce confident young Muslims who would prosper in wider society. For Hiqmah School, the presence of non-Muslim staff and a duality model of ethos represented the *primary means* of achieving those objectives. At Medina Primary a strong emphasis on Islamicisation, along with an all-Muslim staff leading children by example through exercising Islam as 'a lived way of life' (Hussain 2004: 322), represented the *primary means* of achieving the same objectives.

Conclusions

The thesis has offered qualitative insights into the largely under-researched area of Muslim schools in England and Wales. Analysis of research findings revealed that independent and voluntary-aided status had a fundamental influence on ethos in all cases. Furthermore, this influence is explained by the processes of institutional isomorphism which occur when Muslim schools acquire voluntary-aided status. These processes predominantly take the form of mimetic and normative pressures, although becoming part of the informal public/political sphere also encourages coercive isomorphism through formal and informal

expectations. Nasira's narratives of School A and School B indicated the implications of meeting the prerequisites for acquiring voluntary-aided status. Concerns over sustainability consistent with mimetic isomorphism were demonstrated particularly with the narrative of School B whereby meeting the necessary criteria resulted in the school's financial resources having expired at the point that voluntary-aided status was granted. The infrastructure at Medina Primary largely resembled that at School A and School B (for example appointing teachers without formal teaching qualifications) whilst they were in the independent sector.

In contrast, infrastructure at Hiqmah School was isomorphically consistent with that long established at School A following its own transition to voluntary-aided status. Hiqmah had experienced processes of coercive isomorphism, and had fulfilled certain criteria expected of grant-maintained/voluntary-aided schools prior to entering the state sector. Although sustainability was a concern at Hiqmah School, survival was not the central reason for pursuing state funding, as was the case for School B. Rather state funding was pursued at Hiqmah as a step towards developing the school professionally. As part of fulfilling these objectives, Hiqmah experienced processes of normative isomorphism as part of its transition into the state sector, primarily through changes in admissions, increased access to standardised resources and taking on the national curriculum. Processes of coercive isomorphism within the independent sector, and normative isomorphism inherent to entering the state sector, together explain how and why V/A requirements have come to be embodied within the duality model of ethos at Hiqmah School alongside Islamic provision.

Consistent with processes at Hiqmah, School A also underwent processes of normative isomorphism on acquiring voluntary-aided status. Whereas Hiqmah had fulfilled requirements for qualified teachers whilst in the independent sector, School A had not. As a result, processes of normative isomorphism went beyond the provision and expansion of resources at School A, as the requirements for the professional prescriptions of the state meant that unqualified staff were replaced. The narrative of School B's transition, which occurred at the time of the interviews with Nasira, demonstrated processes consistent with those described retrospectively in the cases of School A and Hiqmah School. Isomorphic changes in infrastructure necessarily had implications for ethos at School A and School B, and subsequently distinctions between ethos at Medina Primary and Hiqmah School could be subject to a contextual point of reference. With some exceptions to School A and School B, Hiqmah School underwent normative isomorphic changes in infrastructure on acquiring voluntary-aided status. However, whilst in the independent sector ethos at Hiqmah isomorphically mirrored some elements of ethos present at School A and School B under voluntary-aided status. Hiqmah School therefore underwent fewer changes in infrastructure than School A and School B on joining the state sector owing to the processes of coercive isomorphism which occurred in the independent sector. Nevertheless isomorphic changes were still necessarily incurred and as such ethos was and continues to be necessarily influenced by the school's voluntary-aided status.

In the comparative ethnography of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School the primary objectives of the schools were the same, namely, to produce young Muslims who were confident in their Islamic identity and who would prosper in wider society. However, approaches to achieving those objectives, manifested in the ethos of each school, were opposed. In the case of Medina Primary a predominantly Islamic ethos comprising Islamicisation and an all-Muslim staff leading children by example represented the primary means of producing confident young Muslims. In the case of Hiqmah School, the primary means of producing confident young Muslims was manifested in the duality model of ethos centred around Islamic objectives and V/A requirements. In contrast to Medina Primary, the conviction at Hiqmah School was that a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim staff would prepare pupils for life in wider society. The differing primary means of achieving the same objectives at Medina and Hiqmah reflects each school's status as independent or voluntary-aided. Small numbers of active economic stakeholders at Medina Primary means that it can focus on exercising freedom of religion or belief through a predominantly Islamic ethos and an all-Muslim staff leading pupils by example.

The wider responsibility to passive economic stakeholders – taxpayers – is reflected in the duality of Islamic objectives and V/A requirements within ethos at Hiqmah School. Along with the emphasis on Islamic objectives, embracing V/A requirements places Hiqmah School into the informal public/political sphere. As part of the informal public/political sphere policy developments encourage the development of dialogue through formal and informal expectations – consistent with DiMaggio and Powell's definition of coercive

isomorphism. Although free to focus on freedom of religion or belief, reduced access to other schools and related educational networks means that Medina Primary will have to be active in order to engage with the informal public/political sphere. However, comparable approaches to community cohesion between Medina Primary and Hiqmah School implies that Medina is being active in engaging with the public/political sphere to a similar extent as that demonstrated at Hiqmah. As both Hiqmah and Medina can be seen to be acting on informal or formal expectations, cohesion initiatives at both schools may be the result of processes of coercive isomorphism.

In conclusion, research findings indicate that status as either independent or voluntary-aided fundamentally has implications for infrastructure in Muslim schools in England and Wales. These implications result from processes of institutional isomorphism, experienced in different forms and to differing degrees, by voluntary-aided Muslim schools. The nature of infrastructure in each school in this study had implications for ethos, namely that prerequisites for School A, School B and Hiqmah School becoming voluntary-aided/grant-maintained included subscribing to V/A requirements which extended beyond issues of curriculum or school performance. Research findings from both the comparative ethnography of Medina Primary and Hiqmah School, and the context narratives of School A and School B, indicate that requirements for voluntary-aided status may only allow for Islamic ethos as part of a duality model which incorporates V/A requirements. Thus the extent to which status influences ethos may depend on how closely ethos in a given independent

Muslim school isomorphically represents a duality of Islamic objectives and V/A requirements prior to the transition to voluntary-aided status.

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Appendices

These appendices will include an example of the prompt sheet used for interviews, a completed coding frame for one of the higher level concepts and visual models of ethos for Medina and Hiqmah School.

Appendix A: Interview prompt sheet

The following interview prompt sheet developed throughout the time of the research at Medina Primary and following early interviews with Nasira at School A. It is presented below in the state of development it had reached when used for the research at Hiqmah School, and in the final interviews with Nasira at School B.

1. How did you come to work at the school? (Primarily for class teachers)
 - What is your current role?
 - Have you worked in Muslim schools or any other schools before?
2. Background of the school (Primarily for managerial staff)
 - Could you describe the history of the school?
 - How was it founded?
 - How long was the school independent for?
 - How long has it been voluntary-aided?
 - What was the procedure for acquiring grant-maintained/voluntary-aided status?

3. How would you describe the school's intake?
 - Ethnic background of pupils and families
 - Locality, where do families live?
 - What reasons do you think explain oversubscribed waiting lists?
 - Has the school's intake changed over time?
4. How would you describe the profile of the staff?
 - Ethnic background of pupils and staff
 - How would you describe the relationship between the staff and the ethos of the school? How would you describe their role?
 - How would you describe the influence of staff identity as Muslim or non-Muslim on the overall environment of the school?
 - Has the profile of staff changed over time?
5. How would you describe the ethos of the school?
 - What characterises the ethos of the school?
 - Specifically, what does the ethos offer for parents?
 - How would you describe the form which Islamic provision takes in the school?
6. Ethos: values
 - What values are children encouraged to develop in the school?
 - In what ways are children encouraged to develop these values? Are they explicitly taught in class? Do they learn through everyday school life?

- Does staff identity as Muslim or non-Muslim affect the way children learn about values?

7. Ethos: practices

- What practices are children encouraged to develop?
- In what ways are they encouraged? Are they explicitly taught how to practise? Do they learn through everyday school experiences?
- Does staff identity as Muslim or non-Muslim affect the way children learn about practices?
- What are the arrangements for prayer? Is attendance compulsory for pupils?

8. Language

- Is Arabic spoken in the school? Which phrases are used?
- What is the role of Arabic in the school's ethos?
- Are there many pupils who would be familiar with using a second language at home? Which particular second languages would children be familiar with?

9. Curriculum

- How is the curriculum approached in the school?
- Is there Islamic provision in the curriculum? If so what form does this take?
- How would you describe the role of the curriculum in the overall ethos of the school?

- Have approaches to the curriculum changed over time?

10. How would you describe the profile of parents at the school?

- Do they live locally?
- Are there pupils with families from settled migrant communities? If so which communities are most prevalent in the school's intake?
- Why do parents want their children to attend the school?
- What is it that they want their children to take away from the school on leaving? Where do most pupils go to after year 6?
- Has the profile of parents changed over time?

11. Has the school's status as independent or voluntary-aided ever influenced ethos? (Primarily for managerial staff)

- How would you describe the development of the school over time?
- In your experience what does the independent/voluntary-aided sector offer for Muslim schools?
- What does the future hold for the school?

Appendix B: Example Coding frame

This section includes an example coding frame, complete with interview extracts and references to observation notes and memos, for one of the four higher level concepts which emerged as key strands of ethos at Medina Primary. The example given is the coding frame for '*Nurturing an Islamic environment*', the section for which can be found in Chapter 6. Appendix B demonstrates how the data was organised as lower level concepts, which came together to identify 'Nurturing an Islamic environment' as one of the four key higher level concepts for ethos at Medina Primary. The titles in italics represent each of the lower level concepts. Interview quotes and pointers to observation notes and memos are arranged under relevant lower level concepts.

Lower level concept A: The objectives of Muslim schools

Head, Medina Primary: 18/09/2007

Head: 'On a general basis at the moment I'm not that fond of state funding, although we have a right for it and that sort of thing. It makes a difference; we have flexibility at the moment with staff, intake and curriculum.'

H: 'A gut feeling tells me "he who pays the piper calls the tune." The minute you take the Queen's shilling, so to speak, somehow you are compromised, or the potential is there for compromise. And that's a concern'

H: 'I know there's a state funded school in Yorkshire where it started off as a very very good school, very dynamic head and all sorts of things. They got state funding, the council found some land for them, a new building which is state of the art, and it's in a predominantly non-Muslim area, in that particular city it must be very difficult to find a non-Muslim area, its got a non-Muslim head, a non-Muslim deputy head, majority of staff are non-Muslim, and I get calls from the teacher there responsible for the Islamic ethos to go and do Islam awareness training for the staff at a Muslim school. To me something is wrong there, something's not quite right. People see pound note signs in front of their eyes and just go for it.'

Assistant head, Medina Primary: 18/10/2007

Damian Breen: 'What are the most important parts of the ethos at Medina? In terms of, in the hall you said you wanted to let children know it's about every part of it...'

Assistant head: 'OK. So I mean one of our main objectives really is, obviously it's a very broad statement, but we've sort of erm always aimed to be a school where we develop the Islamic personality. That is the key sort of phrase that we tend to use a lot of, which is quite a broad, there's a lot that we need to break down from there: exactly what we mean by that, but generally that's what we aim to do. You know, erm, develop the Islamic personality as a whole so that, you know, give the holistic approach to education, make children understand that being a Muslim is not just a spiritual act, that it combines everything, that it's a whole way of life so everything that you do is ultimately linked to pleasing the

Lord. And, ultimately, every action basically needs to be done with responsibility, you've got to be responsible for it and, ultimately with the aim of doing it in the correct way, because as you know, Islam is a whole way of life. So that's why we try and develop the curriculum so they can see the links, or not can see the links, but can understand that it is Islam. Whether you're doing, you know, whether you listen to your teachers, or you're doing maths, or you're doing science, ultimately you're doing it for a purpose. There's a purpose behind it. Getting them to see that purpose, obviously for some children with, you know, we have to sort of differentiate as to which age group we're talking to, so I mean at the bottom end, as you saw in the PE lesson, it was just basically making the link you know. Although it was just, the whole topic this term is to do with seasons and, you know, autumn and seeds growing and whatever, although, and this is part of, you see like, we did PE, obviously in the curriculum it's down to movement right? But obviously we focus on the movement part, and we won't, we will use that, for example I've told my TA's to develop tapes with sound on, you know, sounds of different things whatever, that we can use. Now we do use some instruments as well here, the drums, so on and so forth, so that was the whole objective that how we linked it again to the *din*, how we linked it to Islam again was by, we could do the same thing in the state system. I would have done the same thing when, I taught in the state system I've done the same thing, where you pretend to be a tree and you're growing up; we do exactly the same thing but here, the language used during that lesson was there for another reason, was there with the objective of creating that understanding that Allah is the creator, and things only grow by the command of Allah. Do you see? So you know, *Allah* is making the tree grow rather than growing, can you see how it's? It's quite erm,

what's the word, not so "obvious", but it's ultimately building that concept in them.'

AH: 'I've taught in other Muslim schools and I've been visited a lot and during, obviously my degree there was an opportunity to look around Muslim schools and look at their ethos. Because Muslim schools were set at a time when there was very little funding available and so on so forth, and the Muslim community were not exactly very affluent in all areas, they were set up with the ultimate purpose, at that point one of the reasons was to keep girls separate from the state system and keep them away. And so the model was pretty much "adopt the national curriculum, and teach it, and then have add-ons to that. So you'd have Islamic studies, or you'd have Arabic as an add-on, but literally everything else would be, and the dress code would be different, and that would be about it. So you will still find that sector of Muslim schools as still running in that same way. Whereas now there are a few other Muslim schools who have adopted this, I wouldn't call it a new ethos, but have adopted the ethos that actually education needs to incorporate Islam into all subjects. So you've got, there's this really good school, if you really want to visit a very good Muslim school, it's called [school name given] in London and they've got two branches, one is in Slough and one is in Waldomstough. And basically we're linking up with them, well I myself am linking up with them and *insh'Allah* as a school we are, they are developing, this is our objective: to develop the curriculum so there is Islamic input in every single area. We're trying to see, how can we bring it around because although it should be easy, because it hasn't been done before, it's a long process.'

Qur'an teacher, Medina Primary: 17/10/2007

QT: 'That's, really, one of the focus of faith schools, is to give people a chance to, to have, you know, a focused education about manners and behaviour which, hopefully, should give you a method of dealing with people from wherever, whoever and wherever you meet them in the future. And you can never meet everyone. You never meet every group of people. The Polish community have started to move in here you know, up until they'd came who would have experience with the Polish community? Not many people. And some people can go through their whole life and they haven't had the experience of the African-Caribbean community, they just haven't had it. Or the inner-city people, they haven't had any experience of people who live in the country. You know, farming type communities. They don't know about Scottish life, they don't know about life in Wales, they don't know about it, and why are they going to if they live in East Grinstead? They're not going to! And they don't have to, but if they go to Scotland or Wales you want them to be people who can be human beings and treat people nicely, and not call people "jocks" or whatever other insult, you know what I mean? People are prejudiced basically. So I don't think there's any reason to think that people living in distinct communities, which is what a faith school is, in and of itself, breeds prejudice. What breeds prejudice are ideas which are, in and of themselves, maybe they contain innate notions of superiority or conversely that there's something wrong or inferior about different groups. Those are the things that would make children, do make children into adults with prejudices and with social problems.'

QT: 'Trying to show that, the manners, the character, the honesty, the justice, and those things that were exemplified by the prophet, peace be on him, in that early community, that's how a Muslim community should be known. We probably aren't known as that in this day and age, but that's what we're trying to show and trying to explain, and that's the objective of a faith school really, in my understanding.'

QT: 'And as I say, if that was the case in a lot of these so-called 'ghetto schools' one would hope that there would be less of that tension. So even if it's an ethnically, you know, uniform school, if it has a faith element in it there should be less of that rather than more of that. It should be a guide, if one studies the tenets of Islam, they aren't, its not a religion that suggests division or suggests superiority and inferiority in the way one behaves towards people.'

Lower level concept B: Values

Year 1 teacher, Medina Primary 25/10/2007:

Year 1 teacher: 'And then with the children, we instil in them the values and that, so I realised that, as the days went, and I realised that now their behaviour actually, they realise what it depends on. So basically, like I said, it's all to do with their faith so, I feel like the environment is much more, like erm, because of their faith, much more positive I suppose, yeah.'

DB: So when you worked in state schools were any of those Muslim schools?

Y1: 'No. They had a lot of, two of them had a lot of ethnic minority children, but not like a faith school.'

DB: 'I mean in terms of actual values, what values are promoted in, well in general in the school as a whole?'

Y1T: 'In general I think like, things like respect and erm, even behaviour is like, depending, like how to respect your elders so how to respect the teachers, how to respect the head teacher. And even outside we make them learn how to be good Muslims outside of the school as well. But that is more like in year 5/6, so when they go out they know how to behave as well. A lot of things that we teach them is, like I said, the basics so how to, in Ramadan we teach them when we fast, from sunrise to sunset, like that. When we pray *salah*, how many times a day do we do it? How do we pray? What actions? So it's more, we're also teaching them the actual basics of Islam.'

Qur'an teacher, Medina Primary 17/10/2007

QT: 'Whereas without any faith instruction it's very easy for people to fall into these... I mean human beings are tremendously tribal. You just need to look at football supporters and, you know, there's a level at which it's OK, there's a level of which it tips over into a prejudiced, or, racist, or tribalist kind of like attitude, which is underlying, which is you know, or very close to the surface of violence and very unpleasant behaviour which we had through, obviously through the 70's and 80's in football supporters, and in different ethnic groups as

well at different times. Human beings, we're very prone to that. It starts from the clan thing, you know? This was exactly the situation in pre-Islamic Arabia. It was a clan society, completely clannish, and they had all these blood vendettas and revenge and honour codes, one person was, and then everyone would go out and fight against the whole clan, and it was just like, on the scale you see, fairly similar to football supporter type of stuff or you know, when you get these kind of ethnic tensions. And those riots in Oldham, as I recall, were sparked off by, either a white mum pushing a pram being abused by some Asian youths or the other way round. I can't remember which it was, and then word spread through the community "oh they're, this is what they're doing to us", you know revenge! It's exactly how it was... And then everyone was up against everyone. So its exactly to avoid, to kind of like, explain how to deal with people, that was one of the amazing functions, and the successes of the prophet, peace be on him, had in amongst this particular group of people who were completely prone to that, that was their whole way of life. Giving them a different approach which is based on universal values, and based on a submission, a universal submission to God which then puts everyone in the same context so that they were all, having been people of non-faith, had the potential to be people with good behaviour, and with the belief in their creator. But only through treating them as human beings did they have that opportunity to communicate. By treating them like infidels, or some kind of lesser, Islam wouldn't have got anywhere.'

DB: In terms of the actual values, the values that make up the ethos of the school, specifically what do you try to give the children?

QT: 'I think mostly in what we kind of focus on is manners. I mean its something that children have a lot trouble in now days, and sometimes I wonder how far we get because, especially young children might pick up manners but the older they get the more they try and take on the style anyway of rebellion, or kind of, that kind of self assuredness that is the mark of the person now-days. Which can easily fall into bad manners or, yeah. I mean so manners, self-control, being tolerant, you know, learning to deal with difference in arguments without shouting or fighting. Really stuff that, to be honest with you, in a general sense every school tries to portray. I suppose we're trying to explain it in the light of Islam rather than, I mean because the school I was trained at, I mean they had very good discipline procedures and so on, and tried to be fair, and making people realise their actions have consequences and these type of things. I mean these are universal behaviour management techniques, and we call them values as well because if you realise that your behaviour has consequences in the wider society then you become more reflective, and hopefully therefore more measured in your impulses and so on. I suppose that is what we're doing, but again, putting it in an Islamic context, or seeing that as something which ultimately isn't just a social benefit, it has a spiritual benefit as well. So I suppose that's what distinguishes it from otherwise what are fairly, probably quite standard behaviour management kind of, and sort of manners and morals that you're trying to instil. Because most schools come down to the same type of thing, you're trying to keep your hands and feet to yourself, and you don't just slap and fight when you get annoyed you know. You're training children at the end of the day and that involves a lot of similar things, I think from any point of view. I mean there are lots of, Islam was, when I was studying Arabic I did a

couple of modules on Islamic studies from, being taught by, you know, non-Muslim teachers, some of them had categorised it as rather than an orthodoxy, as an orthopraxy which was quite interesting sort of term meaning it has a whole lot of practices that you learn. Things that you're supposed to do, and if you do them that is the mark of a believer rather than necessarily things that you believe, although there are, obviously that as well, there's no point in just doing them. So we spend quite a lot of time explaining to people what they should do. You know, like prayers and, lots of little things, the way you put clothes on, dressing from the right side first and, again training of sort of etiquettes and behaviours, we do quite a lot of that. I'm not sure if one would quite call that *values*, it's kind of like practical training. So, you know, how to wash before prayer and the etiquettes of prayer and so on, the approach to the *Qur'an*. So there is an overlap with sort of values and practice there in our approach to cleanliness and the *Qur'an* and so on, even the way we use our tongues, you know, lying, all these things. But they're universal in that sense, not distinct to the school, but again, explaining the kind of spiritual merit of it, and the spiritual dangers of ignoring it as well I suppose, in that context.'

Lower level concept C: Discipline

Head, Medina Primary 18/09/2007:

H: 'We would put up with far less in terms of negative behaviour from a child before we'd ask them to leave than in the state system. We can set our own tolerance levels if you like. And all of that contributes towards the ethos. What you teach, you know? We had a teacher standing in yesterday in my daughter's class. She came home, "oh dad it was great, great! Its very strict, but it was so

much fun.” You know from, how the teacher does that can make or break the lesson for the child. You can be strict, what a child thinks is strict in the sense that you’ve got order in the place and the kids are doing what you want them to do, at the same time making it fun for them to do it, so its getting that balance right, I think that, that contributes towards the ethos.’

H: ‘We have children move here from state schools and, twins one year, and they were walking round the first week with their fists clenched waiting for the bullying to start. And we had to tell them “chill”, you know? “It doesn’t happen here.” If it does happen we’re down on it like a tonne of bricks. We had another boy, a Somali boy, who was bigger than average in every sense, taller and broader, and again, same sort of thing, looking for the fights. But it didn’t arrive so, I think that is an important aspect of why [Muslim] schools tend to achieve more.’

Qur’an teacher, Medina Primary: 29/10/2007

QT: ‘Our overall approach to discipline I don’t think is, I don’t really think it’s that dissimilar or that distinct as a Muslim school to, certainly I haven’t got huge experience in the state sector but with my training I was working in a school. OK so there were a lot more discipline problems in certain ways but they had a very positive behaviour management ethos where you try and use praise and reward and constantly remind children who have fallen below expectations of the consequences for their actions rather than just blanket reprimanding. And that’s very much the, a sort of modern psychologically based, you know there’s nothing modern about it at all its exactly what Imam Ghazali a foremost Islamic thinker

telling educators what to do in the 12th century. So it's not new, probably for other cultures as well. But it is what's taught by people like Bill Rogers and educationalists and behaviour management people to teach us across the Western establishment. So I don't think, we've got a house point system, you know, and the houses, that type of thing you find quite common in non-Muslim schools and different schools to try to encourage a sense of unity and a bit of competitive edge but also to give some format for the rewards and so on, collective ideas. I think this year, I think the thing with schools, I think its like that in neighbourhoods, you can go through a bad patch with a few young teenagers who wreck a neighbourhood, and you can have that. Here to be honest with you it's a nice quiet year this year. It tends to be the children at the top of the school who will give the most problems, anywhere in the key stage 2 really, obviously little children less so. But we've had our moments and we've had to exclude a couple of children over the last 3 or 4 years that I've been here. But at the moment *al-hamdu lil-lah* we've got a quite reasonably in-control bunch. I mean so I think obviously with an Islamic school, with any independent school, I don't know actually you'd tend to have perhaps less chance of children with more, some of the behavioural issues associated with neglect and not being given much time and attention simply because if parents were prepared to spend money to educate children it is liable they're giving them good attention as well. Not necessarily, but obviously there's a function there to some degree with independent schools generally.'

QT: 'There are individual children who play up and who have a hard time following the rules or keeping on task and so on. I think generally it is a pretty

good year this year and I think maybe that is also a reflection of, over the last few years we have worked hard on them. Getting all the teachers to give the same type of responses and use the strategies that we have agreed are useful, that work.'

Observation notes: 01/11/2007

- Location: Year 2 classroom, history lesson.
- I enter after the start of the lesson.
- Children are at their tables doing a task.
- There is some humming by pupils.
- More chattering, teacher says 'shush', class quietens right down.

Observation notes: 02/11/2007

- Location: Year 3 classroom, numeracy lesson.
- Children are given personal dry wipe boards to complete a task: write half of 16 on the board.
- Some talking between children. Moderate chattering, not loud.
- Teacher says 'quiet class', children quieten.
- After visiting each table the teacher says 'I'm so pleased with the class, *masha'Allah*.'
- Children are set another task: draw a square and colour in one quarter of it. Still at tables.
- Noise rises over the next few minutes. Louder than before.
- Teacher blows a whistle and the class goes silent. She then explains there was too much noise.

- Teacher goes round to each table and encourages children, talks to them, explains the task if they are confused.
- Chattering starts to rise again.
- Teacher uses whistle again and the class goes silent. She explains again that there was too much noise.
- Noise starts to rise after a minute or so.
- Teacher asks several individual children by name for quiet.
- Noise steadily rises and the teacher uses the whistle again, the class falls silent.

Observation notes: 09/11/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, whole school assembly.
- Stars of the week are given out.
- Stars = house points.
- Children are divided up into four 'houses': *Farooqi* (blue), *Alawi* (yellow), *Siddiqui* (green) and *Uthmani* (red).
- There is a 'house points cup' given to the team with the most points at the end of the year.
- House points are given out for good behaviour.
- Several certificates are given out worth 5 house points each.
- As the house points are being given out there is some hissing and sighing by disappointed children when the points are not for their house.
- Exclamations of 'yes' under the breath are heard by children when their house is given points.

- At the end of assembly *Siddiqui* have 261 points, *Farooqui* have 248, *Alawi* have 247 points and *Uthmani* have 220.
- The head plays a quick game of ‘stand up, sit down’. Children play along, standing when he says to and sitting when told to. Excited, children enjoy the game.
- The head says ‘*masha’Allah*, most of you didn’t get caught out!’
- Children then leave by year group.
- Chattering rises.
- Gets louder as children leave. Small groups of children are talking and have not left with their year group, 3 groups of 2-3 children.
- Head teacher raises his voice, disappointed that the groups have not left because they are talking too much.

Observation notes: 20/11/2007

- Location: Year 1 classroom, Islamic studies lesson.
- Children are colouring in black and white printouts.
- Around half of the children are doing the task, the other half are playing on the carpet area.
- Children are chattering, moderate noise.
- Teacher raises her hand and the children raise their hands too and go quiet. It takes one or two children a moment to realise before they put their hand up.

Observation notes: 22/11/2007

- Location: Year 2 classroom, history lesson.
- Children are sitting at their tables doing a task.

- Children have a sheet with statements which have blank spaces. They also have a selection of words, each of which they can only use once to fill in a blank space.
- As children complete the task 4 or 5 walk over to the teacher one by one.
- This involves walking past me, and most of them have a look at my notes.
- One boy is told off by the teacher for flicking pencils.
- More children approach the teacher with their completed task forms.
- Teacher goes through one or two more with children then gains their attention by raising her hand.
- Children raise their own hands and go quiet.

Observation notes: 23/11/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, whole school assembly.
- The room is full and children are arranged in year groups by rows.
- Children are chattering, moderate noise.
- The assistant head starts to count down from 5 and gets silence by 2.

Observation notes: 23/11/2007

- Location: Year 4 classroom, design and technology lesson.
- The teacher is at the board and children are at their seats.
- The teacher starts to list things on the board which have circuits in. She asks for contributions from the children.
- Children put hands up to make suggestions.
- The last two added to the list are 'a crying doll' and a 'doll's house.'

- Teacher suggests that if the girls are good the class can make a doll's house for them with working bulbs.
- Children start to chatter about the possibilities.
- The teacher starts to count down from 5, the class goes quiet again.

Observation notes: 03/12/2007

- Location: Year 4 classroom, science lesson.
- Children are given wires and bulbs to make circuits. Each table has to make a circuit.
- Teacher is helping two boys at one table.
- Another boy dances up to her robotically. She stares at him until he stops.
- There is quite a lot of chattering, moderate noise but it is getting louder.
- Children continue working at their tables, three or four are not at their own tables. Children continue talking.
- Teacher eventually raps a wooden ruler 5 times on the dry wipe board.
- Children act hastily, those away from their seats return to their tables and sit quietly.
- Each rap is counting down from 5 to 1. The dancing boy waits until 1 to return to his seat and be quiet.

Observation notes: 04/12/2007

- Location: Year 3 classroom, history lesson.
- There is a chart stuck to the dry wipe board with a loudness scale: 0 = silence, 1 = quiet work, 2 = group conversation, 3 = too loud, 4 = very loud.

- Teacher sets a task where children have to draw a picture best illustrating the lifestyle of the ancient Romans, and then a picture best illustrating an Islamic way of life.
- Children are at their tables doing the task. There is mild chatter.
- Teacher says everybody should be working at level 1, quiet work.
- Class quietens.
- At the end of the task the teacher asks for volunteers to bring their picture to the front and describe it to the rest of the class.
- One boy is called to the front. He explains that for the Romans he has drawn them watching horse racing and gambling. He has also drawn a picture of what he thinks Mohammad's house would look like.
- Another boy continues to talk throughout the presentation.
- After several warnings from the teacher the boy is sent out for talking.
- After the presentation the teacher asks if anyone else wants to show their picture to the class.
- Children put their hands up and the teacher chooses a girl.
- She comes to the front and explains that her picture of the Romans shows them eating too much and laying down. She had also drawn a picture of a Muslim man sitting on the floor and eating simple food.
- Teacher says they are very good because they show contrast.
- Now time to tidy up. Children get up from tables and put drawing materials away.
- Some children are talking without tidying up.
- Noise rises as the children do this.

- After 2 minutes or so teacher blows a whistle, class goes silent. She explains that she has asked 5 times for the children to tidy up and some are still talking.
- Children are told to tidy up, put chairs on tables and stand behind chairs.
- Teacher finishes the class with a long recitation, one boy receives a house point for reciting so well.

Observation notes: 04/12/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, afternoon prayer (12:55-1:15pm).
- A boy did the call to prayer.
- Another had been asked to do it but had chosen not to.
- The head tells the boy who chose not to do the call to prayer that he has to come up with a good reason by tomorrow morning. Head explains to the boy that he can't just choose not to the call to prayer because he doesn't want to do it.

Lower level concept D: Independent sector and state funding

Assistant head, Medina Primary 07/12/2007:

AH: 'I had a discussion with the head about, why is it that Muslim schools tend to want to go towards the state funding route rather than go towards being another very well run independent school? And you know, go on that side rather than "oh give me the money we'll go into state funding," because there's no, if you look at the independent schools like, all the top schools who end up having students with very, you know, great results, they're not being asked to go for state funding, why?'

***Qur'an* teacher, Medina Primary 17/10/2007:**

QT: 'I think it, the independent sector gives you freedom to develop the Islamic ethos. It does just simply because you have that freedom of the curriculum so that you can, you know, you can, I don't really know the set up with the voluntary-aided schools but from what I understand they, you have to, there's a certain amount of curriculum content you have to teach. You can put stuff on, on top of that, but then you're not going to have primary school children at school from half 8 until half 5. So if you want to do stuff on top of that it would make the day too long. So there's probably a limited amount then that you can put in addition to the national curriculum whereas in an independent school we can modify, I mean we don't do that much DT, we don't do as much DT here, we don't do as much music here, you know there's less in the curriculum of the national curriculum because we've got more of the other stuff. You know *Qur'an*, our prayers, our, Islamic studies, things that take up just hours or minutes in the day. So I think that's one of the main flexibilities you have. Apart from that, in a voluntary-aided school you can set uniform standards and, assembly focuses, there's quite a lot that you could do, but I just think in terms of that overall curriculum content you'd be more limited. And just the amount of time you can spend on the different ideas you might have. Probably if you were very creative you might be able to get around it, I think it would be harder to...'

Head, Medina Primary: 26/10/2007

DB: 'The other thing I hadn't spoken to you in-depth about was the history of the school: when it was established, who the founders were, and how long people have been working with you, who is still here...'

H: 'Right. We opened in September 1998 with four kids, five within a couple of days, in one room up at [name given of an Islamic organisation]. We rented one of the porta-cabin rooms there. With those kids, five kids we had I think three or four different age groups, year groups, and we had one teacher, that teacher was [the assistant head] who is back again with us. She left, got married, moved abroad, had her kids and is now back in this country, so she joined us when we came back here. And then the school sort of grew from there. At [the Islamic organisation] we took over a second room and a third room and then we had the other half of the porta-cabin, because it was a double length porta-cabin, which was a playroom and we put partitions in and made three more classrooms and a corridor and so it became a very nice little school actually, it breaks your heart when you go up there and it's just used as storage, it's still got our kids merit points and lists on the wall which when you look at the names you think these lads are doing their key stage three SATs and beyond now you know? So it's nice to...'

(Woman enters and apologises...)

H: '...We got that, so the school sort of doubled in size and we ended up with 84 kids there, but that was pretty much it. We couldn't get much bigger because the classes were fairly small physically, and by that time we were starting to scout

around, had been since day one when the trust was formed in I think March '98, we had 5 or 6 trustees and having had a series of public meetings and consultations, trying to be each one in a different Mosque, lots of different centres so we weren't labelled as one particular group or whatever. The trustees had been looking for buildings and unable to find anything so we started off a little business in a way because some of the parents bought minibuses, started driving kids back and forwards up to [an Islamic organisation], and that's continues too pretty much. And then we put an offer in for this place, and it was accepted. And it was really strange because we got a phone call one day from the council saying "are you not interested in the building?" What do you mean? "We wrote to you to say your offer's been accepted, we haven't heard back from you." They'd written to our old address, and we hadn't received anything because my office, used to be the trust's postal address, and I'd moved from there so you know. So anyway we got this building, renovated it and moved in. This is our fourth year [2007-2008], it was 2004 September when we moved in here. So this is our tenth year of operation.'

DB: 'And what happened to the school [at the Islamic organisation]?'

H: 'It's empty, it's empty. We asked actually if we could use it for a boys secondary, have a small secondary school there but they weren't very keen on having kids with raging hormones all over the place; which is a shame because it's a lovely site, I don't know if you've been there...

DB: 'No.'

H: ‘... it’s a 10 acre site, and a playing field, it was really good for the kids, they were out in the country basically and you could observe the seasons nicely, wonderful trees, it was great. Really, it was colder out there so if it was like frost up here it’d be snow up there you know, and the kids loved it. When we came down here, it was one of the boys who just left this summer to go to secondary school, looked around and said “*Mudeer*, where’s the field?” This is it I’m afraid you know. So the advantage of coming into [the city], it was obviously easier for parents and the staff, we’ve got a bigger building obviously and it’s our own building, but we don’t have the facilities that we had up there.’

DB: What happens to the children when they finish year 6 here? Are there any secondary schools they can go to?

H: [The head names a local voluntary-aided, mixed sex Muslim secondary school]. ‘I’ve got to send them a memo, I’ve got to fill the form out quick, and we were on holiday when the forms were being issued so, sending them out today telling me “you’ve got to contact the school on the first of October, get the form and get it back to them by the 19th.” There’s a form from the council as well, which has to be completed. Although, half the council staff say “no you don’t because it’s a voluntary-aided school”, the other half say “yes you do, even if it’s a voluntary-aided school”, so I’m gonna say “OK, fill it out anyway.” So most are applying to go to [the voluntary-aided school], and I think, Insha’Allah and God willing, that most will get in. Most of our children this year who’ve just gone into the new year 7 who wanted to get in have got in. And even one or two

who didn't want to get in got in! Not sure how that works! They were expressing disinterest in going there all year, but their parents were, they're there, so.'

Year 3 teacher, Medina Primary: 02/11/2007

DB: Have you ever worked in the state sector?

Y3: 'Yes.'

DB: 'How did you find it?'

Y3: 'I didn't have a good experience but I'm, I'm not that naïve to think, there are good schools and there are plenty of Muslims who work in good state schools and have a really good time and there's a lot of positive aspects of a Muslim working in a state school. The fact that, for non-Muslim children to be taught by an Islamic teacher, I think it really builds up community relations and, I think there's a lot of positive things, but me, I didn't have a very positive experience. I was working in a school where there was no, I think there was one or two Asian children in the school but no-one wearing the headscarf, no-one practicing, and also September the 11th just happened at the time I was working there and I got a very negative reaction from, not only pupils but staff. And because of the way I was dressed I was seen as making a fuss about my religion because there'd been other Muslim teachers there who wouldn't wear the headscarf, who wouldn't wear the black dress and so I was seen as making a bit of a fuss. So I decided to come out of the state sector and work in an Islamic environment that really

supported me practicing. And also the problems with the prayer time, I had a real issue with that and, you know if me wearing the headscarf was causing a fuss imagine if I asked someone to come to take my lesson for 5 minutes!!! (Laughs) So, I know that some people have some really positive things going on in state schools and then, I think there's a lot of benefit from going in there as well as negatives. So I think, I can see both sides of the coin.'

Head, Medina Primary 18/09/2007:

H: 'There are some schools at the moment which are proposed to, to go from scratch as far as I know, as voluntary-aided. Good friend of mine who's doing them and I'm really upset with him for doing it (laughs).'

Assistant head, Medina Primary 18/10/2007:

DB: 'If something really radical happened and this school was given state funding, what could you see happening in that instance? What do you think would happen?'

AH: 'I think the flexibility that we have with the curriculum would be lost for a start. I mean that's something that I've been working on quite hard, is to try and, obviously we're not there yet, but it's something I'm very passionate about, is to try and change the curriculum, and not follow the national curriculum as it is, and I think that definitely would be lost. You know, that flexibility of running, of the curriculum which is the main aspect, you know, the majority of

the time that's what you are doing, you're teaching. And just to have the, I don't think it's enough just to have the add-on of having the Islamic language or having the Islamic clothing in the classroom, I think it needs to be more than that because the children need to learn throughout their day, through the curriculum, the concepts of Islam. The concepts of Islam need to be taught throughout the day not just through some words that you use to praise children, or through the dress code, or just having *salah* and so on and so forth, I think it needs to be done throughout. And that definitely would be lost because there would be a lot of rigmarole, a lot of bureaucracy coming in with the state funding.'

DB: 'There may also be a 25% intake of other faith or non-faith children given the current debate...'

AH: 'That's what they say but it doesn't happen. It very rarely happens. I think the head was saying we also don't have a closed policy, admissions policy, we are open but it's very rarely we, we've never had the situation where we've had someone asking to come here. I suppose there's no need. But I suppose if we went the other way, went to the other spectrum that we were very well organised and well run and we were on par with the other independent sector schools within England then you might get that.'

***Qur'an* teacher, Medina Primary: 17/10/2007**

DB: 'What about schools with, where the whole intake is Muslim or...'

QT: 'Under that definition there would be loads of Muslim schools, I mean amongst the state schools where there's 99.9% Muslim children in the school. The staff and the head aren't, you know necessarily, some of them might be Muslim, but you know, it's not necessarily run according to any particular Islamic ethos although there's likely to be more sensitivities. I've got a friend of mine who's the head at a school in Bradford, (pause) actually some of, there's at least one school, I think in Wales that did have that, and actually then became a grant-maintained Islamic school. It'd be quite an interesting school, I'm sure there was one, or it tried to do that, you know basically you know 100% more or less Muslim children, and they had the Muslim head who said "well why don't we just make this a Muslim school then?" Make it a grant-maintained state school rather than, you know a sort of non-denominational one. I think they did it, I'm trying to remember, it was quite a while ago now.'

DB: Some of the reading that I've looked at talks about *de facto* faith schools to develop arguments against faith schools...

QT: 'You could call them ghetto schools, although that doesn't sound very nice. Effectively that's what, they're schools within a particular community and, state schools within a community and, you know, everyone who's at that school happens to be, or a vast majority, from one particular community. So there's quite a lot, like you say in Oldham, my wife's sister teaches in a school like that in Oldham, a primary school.'

Observation notes: 03/12/2007

- Location: Year 4 classroom, science lesson.
- ‘*Shukran*’ in phonetic Arabic is written on signs around the school e.g. in the communal office there is a sign that reads ‘please turn off the lights, *shukran*’, ‘*shukran*’ is written on the donations box in the waiting area.

Observation notes: 07/12/2007

- Location: communal office.
- Energy saving is emphasised through signs displayed throughout the school.
- The light is only on in the staffroom when people are in there. A sign next to the switch reads ‘please turn off when not in use.’
- The photocopier in the communal office is only turned on when in use.

Lower level concept E: Distinctive ethos

Head, Medina Primary: 18/09/2007

DB: Is ethos in this school something which you wouldn’t find in any other Muslim school? Or is there an over-arching Islamic ethos that Muslim schools aim for?

H: ‘I think we’re starting to see a bit of consensus around the place. We try to approach, and its something I’ve said in various forums around the place, other schools have adopted it as well, this whole notion of having religious/secular goes out of the window, the whole notion of actually teaching within the box goes out the window, we’ve kicked the box out of the window, we’re not bothered about that. The idea is that we teach everything within an Islamic framework, and that encompasses formal curriculum and informal curriculum,

the hidden curriculum. So the whole school should reflect the fact that we're Muslims. It's important that the staff when we greet each other, or when we're dealing with each other, that the kids can see how we are, when we're dealing with the parents, that they can see that this is Islam in action, can be able to recognise it as something distinctly to do with their faith. We achieve that with varying degrees of success, depending across the school, who the teacher is and what the subject is. But that's the intention, that's sort of the ground work that we have, the hope, God willing, that at the end of the day the child will start to understand that Islam is more than what we look like, what we wear, we've got a cap on, a scarf, a beard, whatever it might be, and that it's something they should be living. Now a lot of faiths do that, and a lot of schools can say they do that, but I think in, this is our tenth year of operation now, that we've developed, if you like, a niche in the sense of the emphasis that we place on the *Qur'an* within the school. Every day starts with the *Qur'an*, it always has done and it's something that will continue, so much so now that we've got a member of staff full-time, before it was part-time volunteer, members of staff full-time who's job is to teach *Qur'an* and to teach Arabic linked to the *Qur'an*. Not as a language as such, because we find that generally that fails cos the kids aren't practicing it at home. So the interaction they have with Arabic language everyday is the *Qur'an*. So if we can teach them the basics of Arabic, to be able to understand *Qur'an* then that's gonna have more success rather than being able to go to Egypt and have a conversation with a taxi driver, which you could probably still do! I think in one sense, I know we've got a bit of a reputation around the place for that, and we know parents have moved from London and the south-east specifically for that, because of the emphasis we place on that. People say we

are more Islamic than other schools, but this is one of these terms which doesn't really mean much, it depends on what your definition of Islamic is in the first place. So it's hard to say, ethos is something which is, it can't be kind of pinned down, but most visitors to us tell us that there's a nice atmosphere in the school. To me that's a good ethos, on a very simple level, because to me that means that we're doing what we set out to do, it's a happy place to be for most of this kids and most of the staff, and that people want to be here, so its very helpful.'

Observation notes: 17/10/2007

- Location: communal office.
- There is a framed painting of *Al-Masjid al-Nabawi* (Mosque of the Prophet) to the left as I enter.
- The picture is framed against a grey and white background with an Arabic inscription. Note: the inscription uses the Arabic alphabet (Arabic *abjad*) rather than Arabic words in phonetic English.

Observation notes: 18/10/2007

- Location: year 4 classroom, maths lesson.
- Children sing a *salam* greeting to the teacher and I when prompted '*assalamu alaikum*' by the teacher.
- There is an Arabic sign above the dry wipe board, again using Arabic characters rather than displaying Arabic words in phonetic English.

Observation notes: 18/10/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, foundation two PE lesson.

- There is a large drape hanging at the far end of the *Masjid* facing the main entrance to the room.
- The drape has a depiction of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque printed on it.
- Names of the children's 'houses' under which house points are collected are positioned at four points around the room. Two at equal intervals on the wall to my right, and two at equal intervals on the wall to my left.
- House names are *Farooqi* (blue), *Alawi* (yellow), *Siddiqui* (green) and *Uthmani* (red).

Observation notes: 19/10/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, key stage 2 *Qur'an* lesson.
- Verses from the *Qur'an* are written on the dry wipe board by the *Qur'an* teacher.
- Again, the teacher is using Arabic characters (the Arabic *abjad*/alphabet) to write the verses on the board.
- Children are asked to contribute in between recitations. The teacher points to parts of Arabic text on the board and asks the child first to recite the phrase out loud in Arabic using the *tajwid*, then to explain to the class what the phrase means in English.
- This means that children are learning how to read Arabic, how to recite using the *tajwid* and the meaning behind recitations.
- Sign to the right of the main entrance to the *Masjid* reads 'The *Masjid* is where we find concentration in silence.'

Observation notes: 19/10/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, key stage 1 lesson.
- *Qur'an* teacher explains that 'we say *Ameen* when we want something to be so'.
- Children make the recitation and say *Ameen* at the end.

Observation notes: 25/10/2007

- Location: Year 2 classroom.
- *Qur'an* teacher is giving an Arabic lesson.
- Teacher starts by playing '*ustad* says', a variation on 'Simon says', in Arabic (later confirmed).
- There is a display of the Arabic alphabet across one wall. Each letter is represented firstly in Arabic, using the Arabic *abjad*, then in phonetic Arabic using English characters.
- Teacher is drawing pieces of fruit on the board, then writing the name of the fruit slowly using the Arabic alphabet until children guess correctly what the fruit is.
- Children are encouraged to contribute answers in Arabic.
- No English spoken by the teacher until the end of the lesson.

Observation notes: 26/10/2007

- Location: Year 1 classroom, Islamic studies lesson.
- Months of the year are displayed in English and phonetic Arabic across the wall to my left.

Observation notes: 01/11/2007

- Location: Year 2 classroom, history lesson.
- Sign next to windows reads ‘please shut the windows before you leave, *shukran.*’ Again use of phonetic Arabic.

Year 3 teacher, Medina Primary: 02/11/2007

Year 3 teacher: ‘One thing I like about the school is it’s like a safe Islamic environment and that’s what, why I want to work here and why I send my children here because in a state school you wouldn’t get that. I think it means that in school and in home they’re in a similar kind of environment, they’re being told similar things, so in that way its almost like the school is supporting what is happening at home rather than it being a completely different message almost. And that’s, I think, how they’re supporting it.’

Observation notes: 02/11/2007

- Location: Year 3 classroom, numeracy lesson.
- ‘Months of the Islamic calendar’ display with names of months in phonetic Arabic and in Arabic characters.

Observation notes: 05/11/2007

- Location: Year 1 classroom.
- Display on the wall: ‘Golden Rules.’
- Sign number 1: Always remember *Allah*;
- Sign number 2: Be gentle and kind;
- Sign number 3: Look after our materials and books;

- Sign number 4: Always tell the truth;
- Sign number 5: Walk in the classroom;
- Sign number 6: Be neat and tidy and
- Sign number 7: Share.
- Also a display with a tiny fabric prayer mat and cloth cap pinned to the wall.

Observation notes: 09/11/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, key stage 1 *Qur'an* lesson.
- The *Qur'an* teacher opens the lesson by playing 'ustad says' with the children in Arabic.

Observation notes: 09/11/2007

- Location: Year 1 classroom, Arabic lesson, *Qur'an* teacher leading.
- Arabic used from the start. This is different to *Qur'an* lessons where recitations are explained in detail to the children in English.

Observation notes: 30/11/2007

- Location: Year 2 classroom, numeracy lesson.
- Teacher calls the register, addressing children '*asslalamu alaikum* [child's name]'. Child responds '*walaikum salam.*'

Observation notes: 04/12/2007

- Location: Year 3 classroom, history lesson.
- Display mounted on the wall behind me entitled: 'we performed a shadow puppet show about the story of *Nuh.*'

- Teacher calls the register addressing children ‘*asslalamu alaikum* [child’s name]’. Child responds ‘*walaikum salam.*’
- A poster is mounted above the door of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Observation notes: 04/12/2007

- Location: Year 3 classroom, history lesson.
- Children finish the lesson by singing a long recitation from the *Qur’an*.

Observation notes: 05/12/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, key stage 1 *Qur’an* lesson.
- *Qur’an* teacher writes recitations on the dry wipe board using the Arabic *abjad*.
- At the beginning of the lesson the *Qur’an* teacher asks the class for ‘a big *salam*’. The children together say ‘*assalamu alaikum!*’ loudly.
- The dry wipe board has extracts from the *Qur’an* written in the Arabic *abjad* on both sides. The *Qur’an* teacher flips it over half way through the lesson.
- Emphasis is placed on the meanings of recitations. Not just Arabic used in this class, meanings of recitations are explained in English.

Observation notes: 10/12/2007

- Location: *Masjid*, prayers (12:55-1:15pm).
- These notes were made after the day's events.
- There are lines of black tape across the cream carpet floor arranged in rows which children and staff arrange themselves in so they are facing Mecca when praying.

- When standing at the main entrance to the *Masjid* staff and children are facing the far right hand corner of the room when praying.
- At the end of prayers children approach adults, including me, saying ‘*assalamu alaikum*’ before leaving.

Observation notes: 17/12/2007

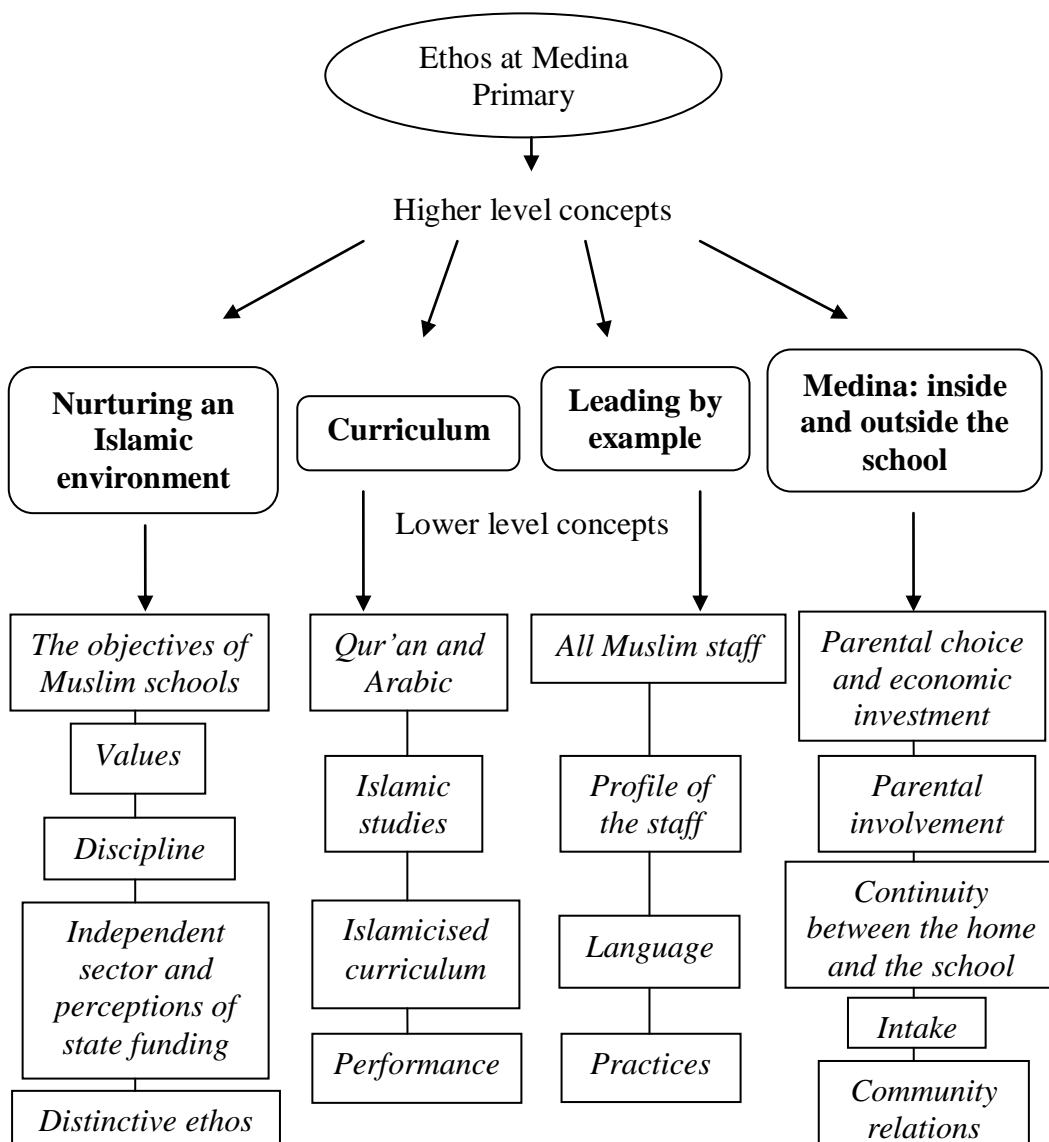
- Location: *Masjid*, whole school assembly.
- The school have raised some money for a local hospital and are to present a cheque to two representatives of the hospital (a man and a woman) in today’s assembly.
- Representatives have brought a mascot costume of a fox dressed as a doctor.
- The head teacher has left the *Masjid* to put the costume on.
- The *Masjid* is full of staff and pupils.
- The children sing a *salam* greeting to the visitors.
- From the front of the prayer room I can see the drape depicting the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque.
- Above my head is the mosaic which children made depicting the *Al-Masjid al-Nabawi* (the ‘Mosque of the Prophet.’)
- The assistant head opens the assembly. The children together say ‘*assalamu alaikum!*’ loudly for the guests.
- Atmosphere is characterised by high spirits.
- The head appears as a fox with doctor’s clothes on, the children rush to him and pull his arms.
- The head’s daughter takes photographs of the head surrounded by children and the head with the visitors from the hospital.

- The head leaves and reappears shortly without the costume on.
- One of the representatives of the hospital gives a thank you speech. He explains he is a children's doctor and that the money donated will go towards equipment to help children with heart and lung problems.
- The assembly formally ends with the head teacher calling for a big '*Allahu akbar!*' as the man and woman from the hospital leave. The children oblige enthusiastically.

Appendix C: Visual Models of Ethos

This appendix offers two visual models of how the lower and higher level concepts which comprise ethos in each of the case study schools are ordered. The first model will show the higher order and lower level concepts which make up ethos at Medina Primary. The second will show the higher and lower level concepts which comprise ethos at Hiqmah School. Higher level concepts are in bold font and lower level concepts are in italics. Displaying visual models in this way helps to quickly identify the key facets of ethos for each school.

Model of ethos at Medina Primary



Model of ethos at Hiqmah School

